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THEY WERE NOW CREEPING TOWARD HIM STEALTHILY, EACH OF THEM WITH A LASSO COILED IN HIS HAND, IN READINESS FOR USE.

Daredeath Dick; KING OF THE COWBOYS; OR, In the Wild West with Buffalo Bill.

BY LEON LEWIS,
AUTHOR OF "DEAD AND ALIVE," "A LEAP IN THE DARK," "THE OUTLAW COLONY," "RED KNIFE," "THE BOY MAGICIAN," "THE SILVER SHIP," "SYRIA, THE JEW-ESS," ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I. A NOVEL SITUATION.

THE opening scene of our narration is a vast, undulating plain in the midst of the Rocky Mountains, with a well-defined route traversing it, and yet strangely lone and solitary—a characteristic landscape of the great Wild West, in all its native grandeur, in all its sublime ruggedness of beauty!

The sun had vanished behind the mighty peaks forming the western horizon, and the ravines and other depressions of the plain were rapidly filling with shadows.

The silence was broken only by the tread of two jaded horses and the voices of their riders—a robust, fine-looking man of middle age, and a charming, blue-eyed girl of eighteen or twenty.

They were Sir Francis Pollock, M. P., of London, and his only daughter.

Their faces were singularly anxious and preoccupied, as if they had been called to the New World by affairs of the gravest importance.

What their errand was will be speedily apparent.

The pace of their steeds, after sundry short spurts, which cost more in belaborings and chirrupings than they were worth, had at length permanently degenerated into a walk.

"Considering that this is an old Spanish trail, Adeline," suddenly said Sir Francis, with a keen and nervous glance around, "and that it has also been used as a military road by the Government, it's odd that there are so few settlers and travelers hereabouts. We haven't seen a soul or a dwelling since three o'clock. I begin to be anxious about our supper and lodgings."

"Strange, too, that we do not overtake that wagon-train which was reported to be just ahead of us, papa," returned the maiden, thoughtfully. "It must have turned southward to enter Utah, or northward to enter Montana."

"If it be not a myth," supplemented Sir Francis, with a sigh expressive of growing anxiety. "I didn't credit all I heard at that last stopping-place. All I've been looking for is to arrive at a ranch in time for supper, as they said we would."

"We may have passed the ranch without seeing it," suggested the daughter—"some of these settlers build so far from the route, and in such retired, shaded spots."

"In any case, it's becoming a serious question where we are to pass the night," declared Sir Francis, with another long glance ahead. "I fear we've been rash, Adeline, to trust ourselves in these solitudes without a strong escort. What if harm should befall you! We can't be far from the haunt of the terrible band of outlaws called the Jay Hawks. Roving bands of red-skins have been seen hereabouts recently. Our situation is certainly one of extreme danger!"

"It may be so, papa," admitted the girl, with a glow of heroism and devotion on her cheeks and in her eyes, "but our duty is here! It is here that Harry vanished so strangely and suddenly! It is here that we must seek the secret of his fate!"

That the words of the fair girl may not remain a riddle to the reader, we must offer a brief explanation.

As is now so frequently the case with wealthy Englishmen, Sir Francis Pollock had invested his capital liberally in the Wild West of America, having a large interest in the *Great Western Land and Cattle Company, of Colorado*.

Of this company Harry Pollock, the baronet's only son, had been, for more than two years, the Resident Manager, with headquarters in the Green River Valley.

This young gentleman was now mysteriously missing.

All communications from him had suddenly ceased, and no clew could be obtained to his whereabouts, or to the cause of his extraordinary silence.

Sir Francis and his daughter had accordingly hastened to the New World to look up the missing son and brother, almost certain that he had been overtaken by some dreadful misfortune.

"What you say, Adeline, is only too true," declared the baronet, after a brief pause. "I feel, with you, that something terrible has happened. Your brother is the soul of honor and affection, and his letters to us would not have

ceased so suddenly without cause. He would have written us if it were possible for him to do so. In view of all these facts, perhaps I ought to have stated the situation frankly to the Governor of Colorado before leaving Denver. Perhaps I ought to have come here with a sheriff and his posse, if not with a company of troops!"

The girl shook her head energetically.

"All that can be invoked later," she said. "Before we ask such aid we must know just what we want—in a word, what is the situation of affairs at the headquarters of the company, a point about which we shall be enlightened in the morning. Would that we could advise with Buffalo Bill! He not only has an interest in our company, but he may have met Harry, in which case they would quickly become friends. How fortunate that Buffalo Bill is so soon coming East from his grand tour of the Pacific Slope! We must improve the first opportunity of invoking his assistance."

"Yes, that is a very essential step," returned Sir Francis, with a mien which attested that the mention of Buffalo Bill had inspired him with new hope. "At last accounts he was at Salt Lake City, and it cannot be long before he will be flying eastward over the Union Pacific. Doubtless we shall see him at Denver, if not sooner. In the mean time, I hope we shall be able to at least form a rational theory concerning your brother's disappearance. Have you any new suggestion to offer?"

"No, papa. I still think that the actual situation of affairs has been brought about by the rage and revenge of the managers of some rival company. You will remember that Harry wrote about having come into collision with a man named Artilow, who is the representative of one of the largest corporations on the plains, as well as its financial owner. Shots had even been exchanged between the cowboys of Artilow and those of our company. In any case, what we have to do is to investigate as quietly as possible. I believe we have done well to come here unattended—almost in secrecy. If that man Artilow is still in this vicinity we must take good care not to tumble into his hands. Do you really regret any step we have taken, papa?"

The baronet shook his head slowly, but with increasing gravity, as he noted how rapidly the shadows of the approaching night were deepening around him.

His anxieties were already many and pressing.

"But see!" suddenly cried Adeline, in tones indicative of the keenest relief. "We're not so wretchedly situated after all. Yonder is a light which indicates that we are near the end of our troubles, at least for to-night."

"Sure enough," assented the father, his mien instantly becoming as joyful as his daughter's. "That light must be at the ranch promised us."

"Or at some other, papa. Joy! joy! I'm so glad for your sake. The house is a little way north of the trail. We may as well take a short cut."

"To be sure," returned Sir Francis, "as I see nothing of fences or cultivated fields to impede us."

The travelers changed their course accordingly, taking a bee-line toward the light, and their jaded steeds pricked up their ears and quickened their pace.

A charming scene soon became visible, its foreground consisting of a couple of acres of emerald lawn, with purling watercourses at each side, which were sharply indicated by the trees forming a fringe above them.

The background began with a forest of oaks and pines and finished with a ledge of jagged rocks.

In the midst of the lawn, half-inclosed by isolated trees of fair size, was a dwelling of somewhat striking aspects and proportions for such a lone situation, the central structure appearing to be two stories in height, and having at each side a considerable wing, the whole being of sawed timber, with clapboard exterior, and neatly painted.

A sign bearing these words, "TRAVELER'S REST," caught the gaze of the father and daughter.

"What an odd place for an inn," said the latter, involuntarily, as the couple rode nearer. "It must be conducted for the pleasure of the proprietor rather than for profit."

"Doubtless," returned the father. "We may be sure that he has large herds of cattle, and is independent of such poor business as furnishing an occasional meal to a chance wayfarer."

A dog which had already barked repeatedly came around a corner of the "Rest" at this moment, and was followed by a thick-set, burly man, with an ill-favored aspect and air, who advanced to meet the new-comers.

"This is not the Cottonwood Ranch?" queried Sir Francis as he dismounted, offering his hand to his daughter.

"No, sir," replied the disagreeable-looking proprietor, in a tone even more disagreeable than his aspect. "You've left the Cottonwood a long way behind you."

"Then we must trouble you, sir, to take us in for the night," pursued the baronet, suppressing a sentiment of mistrust with which the mien

and appearance of his host had already inspired him. "We may take it for granted, I fancy, that you are not crowded with guests, in such an out-of-the-way spot."

"Quite right, sir," said the host, taking the horses by the bridles. "There's no one here save myself and son."

The latter word was accompanied with a nod at a red-bearded, shocky-headed young fellow, who had just come out of the front door, and was staring with marked curiosity and surprise at the travelers.

"Here, Bradd," called the father, with a reprobativ look and gesture, "don't stand gaping in that style at the lady, even if she is the first one you have seen for six months past. Take these horses to the stable, and let them have the best of care in due course."

Bradd hastened to obey in silence, disappearing with the horses to the rear of the inn, while the proprietor led the way up a porch with several steps, and into the principal room of the dwelling.

"Sit down," invited the proprietor, waving his hand toward a lounge and a chair. "I presume you are hungry. I can give you some nice steaks from a young bueffer, if you haven't had too much of that sort o' thing already. Also eggs and milk, with tea and toast, good bread and butter, cake and—"

"We're in no wise particular, landlord," interrupted the father, with an air sufficiently reserved to preclude unnecessary questions. "Let us have whatever you can supply the most readily."

Nodding assent, the proprietor proceeded to a little room in the rear of that of which the travelers had taken possession.

Here his voice was heard alternating with that of a tall, rawboned woman who had hovered a few moments near the door of communication between the two apartments, thus affording the travelers somewhat incomplete glimpses of her.

"That's the wife and mother, I suppose," observed the maiden, in a whisper. "They seem to be a somewhat ill-favored lot."

The proprietor soon came back to his guests.

"Supper will be ready in a few moments," he announced, surveying the couple keenly without appearing to do so. "I dare say you would like to wash off the dust—especially the young lady. Permit me to show you to your rooms."

He opened a couple of doors communicating with one of the wings, and added:

"As you see, sir, the room of the young lady—your daughter, of course—adjoins yours."

Taking possession of the two small apartments thus placed at their disposal the travelers availed themselves of the opportunity of removing the dust of the long and wearisome road from their features and garments.

"What stuffy little rooms!" commented the daughter, with glances of mingled curiosity and disgust. "They're hardly bigger than those afforded by a 'prairie schooner' or Gypsy wagon!"

"How plainly furnished, too!" returned the father. "Not a stick more than the essential!"

Returning to their host in due course they found him in the act of placing their supper on the table, and complied in silence with his invitation to take their places.

"You've not been here long, sir?" queried the father, as soon as the business of the moment had been duly entered upon.

"No, sir—only a couple of years," answered the proprietor.

"The spot is lonely," said Sir Francis. "Are you never molested by the Indians?"

"Never, sir. The red-skins have nearly all been driven hundreds of miles to the northward."

"Do the Jay Hawks ever intrude?"

The landlord flushed uneasily, with a covert glance at the travelers, but shook his head.

Sir Francis did not feel drawn to his host sufficiently to ask for any information concerning the cattle companies doing business in that part of the State, and a long pause succeeded.

"Strange the old woman does not show herself further or say a word to us," whispered Adeline, as she finished her repast. "That son was a tough-looking customer. Have you noticed, papa, that the landlord is constantly carrying his hand to his hair and beard, as if to adjust them?"

"Yes. I was about to suggest that he probably wears a false beard and a wig. His complexion seems odd, too—as if it were assumed as a disguise."

"In any case, he's not a man to be trusted," added the daughter. "I'd like to ask a few questions, but it's wiser to hold our tongues. I could put no faith in any answers or statements he might give us."

Arising and advancing to the porch, the travelers discussed the situation of affairs at some length, and partially formed their plans for the morrow.

"No doubt you are tired, Adeline," then said the baronet. "The day has been the severest we have seen since leaving England. The sooner we're abed and asleep the better, as we must take an early start in the morning. As a matter of fact, I feel strangely sleepy since I took that last cup of tea."

"That's my case, papa," returned Adeline. "I can hardly keep my eyes open."

Leaving orders for the host to call them at daylight, if by chance they overslept, the travelers proceeded to their rooms, and within a few minutes thereafter had lost all consciousness of their surroundings in the soundest of slumbers.

When the baronet awoke, a gust of wind was sweeping over his features, and the barking of a wolf was heard in close proximity to him.

More, he was conscious of lying on a damp sward, with tall grass waving around him.

Startled and wondering, he sat up abruptly, sending a swift glance around.

What a change from his last conscious recognitions!

He was no longer in bed, but out of doors!

With what celerity he gained his feet will be readily imagined.

The broad lawn, the fringed water-courses, the forest and rocky ledge beyond—all these features of the scene still remained, showing distinctly in the moonlight and starlight.

But the "Travelers' Rest" had vanished!

The spot it had so recently occupied was now a bit of green prairie.

The baronet found himself within a few yards of the spot where he had dismounted, with his daughter, such a short time before.

But he was now alone!

Only the bark of a prowling wolf disturbed the profound silence.

Adeline Pollock had vanished with the strange and sinister tavern—with its ill-favored host and his red-whiskered, shock-headed son.

Sir Francis stood as if petrified—a silent monument of consternation and horror.

CHAPTER II.

BUFFALO BILL'S HALT.

A TRAIN was whirling rapidly eastward on one of the central divisions of the Union Pacific, late in the afternoon.

It was Buffalo Bill's "Special," containing his ponies, cowboys, Indians, etc., with all their baggage and trappings.

It was bowling along finely, the conductor having received orders to keep out of the way of the Eastern and Western Express by reaching Green River Station at eight o'clock in the evening.

All was quiet aboard the train, even in the passenger-car where Buffalo Bill, Nate Salisbury and other choice spirits of the great Show were assembled.

At length the whistle of the locomotive resounded loudly and the train gradually came to a halt.

The object in view was to coal and water at an obscure station, whose name has escaped our memory.

The train had scarcely come to a standstill, when two men climbed aboard of the passenger-car briskly and took their way into the interior.

"Is Buffalo Bill here?" demanded a voice anxiously.

At this demand Buffalo Bill aroused himself from the seat on which he was camped and bent a keen gaze of inquiry upon the speaker.

What he saw was sufficiently striking—a Rip Van Winkle sort of personage, very old and thin, with a beard that descended nearly to his waist, and with long and unkempt grayish hair, while his garments, besides presenting a motley assortment of clothes and furs, were literally hanging in tatters.

"I am Buffalo Bill, my friend," said the plainsman. "What can I do for you?"

A regretful sort of smile crept into the shrewd, keen face of the new-comer as he demanded:

"What! you don't remember your old pard?"

Buffalo Bill changed his position a little, so as to get a better view of the stranger, and an answering smile of recognition appeared on his face.

"Jack Pilot, as true as I live!" he exclaimed, gaining his feet quickly and offering his hand. "Sit down here! How you have changed! What an age since I saw you!"

"Yes, for men who live the sort of life we do, old pard—more'n eight years!" returned Jack Pilot, as he sat down. "But I don't see as you've changed an atom. The world has used you well, I hear."

"Let's see, Jack; the last news I heard of you was that you had been killed by a grizzly," said Buffalo Bill, reflectively. "Evidently you pulled through?"

"Yes, Bill—after lying on my back three months."

"Where've you been all this time?"

"Mostly on the Slope, Bill—somewhere 'tween Columby and Lower Cal. Have been miner, woodman, homesteader, prospector—above all, the 'tarnal rover an' rolling-stun' you allus knowed me to be!"

"And it's the old story, I suppose—the rolling stone that gathers no moss, no doubt? In that case, I'm doubly glad to see you, for I am now in a position to prove to you, Jack, that such friendship as ours is something more than a name. How much will you have?" and the stout hand of Cody went down into his pocket.

"Enough to get a nice little cottage on some hillside for the remainder of your days?"

"No more of that, Bill—no more!" exclaimed the visitor, with moistened eyes and a quavering voice. "I'm glad to see you still have the same generous heart I knew so well in the olden time. You was allus true blue! But, it isn't money, old pard," and he hitched nearer, lowering his voice. "I've got millions of it at my disposal—yes, *tens o' millions!*"

Buffalo Bill looked his old friend squarely in the eyes a moment, and realized that there was no discount upon the information.

"Then these rags—"

"Ar' simply a blind!" assured Jack Pilot. "I should be 'stuck up' afore night if the wolves around me were to even suspect how richly I've struck it! I've found one o' the richest veins in the world, Bill—a spot where we can take out nugget-gold by the bar'l!"

Buffalo Bill nodded understandingly, offering his congratulations.

He had seen enough of the Wild West to know that its tale of mineral wealth has not been half told.

As to Jack Pilot, his simple good faith and sincerity was apparent in every word and glance. He was calm and serene, even dull and undramatic, as if the wonders of which he was speaking had become an old story.

"The spot in question isn't sixty miles from here," pursued the discoverer. "We can be there in the morning, with the aid of a relay of your ponies. Hearing that you were coming eastward to-day, I have been on the watch to meet you. What I want of you, Bill, is to go and look at my gold!"

Buffalo Bill shook his head regretfully.

"I can't do that," he declared. "We're billed to show in Denver next Friday."

This answer did not discourage Jack Pilot in the least. He seemed to have expected it.

"Nevertheless you'll come," he said. "What are all the shows in the world to what I tell you? See here, Bill. You know I'm without chick or kin. I'm all broken up, naterally 'nuff, sence that grizzly made a chaw o' me! I'm weak's a baby—almost gone, although the idee o' seein' you has given me new life. You're my nateral heir. Afore I die, Bill, I want you to come and see that gold. It's all to be yours. Think what good you can do with it! Will you stop over at Green River Station—the best p'int for us, although not the nearest—and go and see this new El Dorado for yourself?"

"One moment," returned Bill. "Who is this man with you?"

He indicated the man who had entered with Jack Pilot, since remaining in the background, but who was now making his way toward them.

"A gentleman of whom you already know something," declared Jack. "Sir Francis Pollock, M. P., which ar' Member o' Pawliment, of London."

"Indeed! Sir Francis, I am glad to make your personal acquaintance," said Buffalo Bill, offering his hand. "As shareholders in the 'Great Western Land and Cattle Company,' if for no other reason, we ought to be acquainted. But, how pale you are!—how uneasy and excited! What has happened?"

"The most dreadful of misfortunes, Mr. Cody," replied the baronet, his eyes filling with tears he could not repress. "Have you ever met my boy?"

"Harry Pollock, who has been resident manager of the company ever since its organization, two years ago? Yes, Sir Francis—but once only, a mere chance meeting."

"Well, Harry is missing, Mr. Cody, and has been missing more than three months," communicated the baronet, vainly endeavoring to speak calmly. "His letters to us ceased suddenly three months ago, and in all this subsequent interval we have not been able to obtain the least clew to his fate. Our herds have been stolen, scattered and wholly broken up. Our ranch on Green River has been burned. And not a trace of the authors of these outrages—not a trace."

A swift flush leaped to the cheeks of Buffalo Bill—a keen light to his eyes.

"I had not heard of this, Sir Francis," he declared. "As you know, I have been upon the Slope for many months past, and have not kept posted about events in this quarter."

"And this is not all, Mr. Cody," resumed the baronet, brokenly. "Not hearing from Harry, and failing to get any clew to his whereabouts, I resolved to come out here and hunt him up, and could do no less than accede to the desire of my only daughter to come with me. Last night, while making our way toward the headquarters of the company at Green River, we put up at a wayside inn, the 'Traveler's Rest,' retiring early, my daughter having a room next to mine. Not far from two o'clock in the morning I was aroused by a gust of wind sweeping over my face, or by the bark of a wolf, and found myself lying on the prairie, alone, while the inn had totally vanished, and my daughter with it."

Bill listened with a look of pained comprehension.

"This is indeed horrible, Sir Francis," he

commented. "That inn is a portable one—a tavern on wheels. It is built in three divisions. The second story is a mere 'make believe'—a simple wall of boards, with painted windows. The wheels have a rim and tire a foot wide, so as to roll over the prairie without leaving ruts behind them. The place is kept by a man named Artilow, assisted by his son. They are the most consummate cut-throats in existence. Their tavern is another Bender trap—a den of the most frightful description. It is said that more than fifty persons have been put out of the way in that inn during the last three years. It is constantly changing its situation, hardly ever remaining two nights in the same place. I've heard of its being in Montana or Idaho, and the next thing I knew it would be in Utah or Nevada."

The baronet groaned, his white face seeming to grow still whiter.

"And such being the facts concerning this terrible 'Flying Tavern,' as I find it is called, Mr. Cody," he exclaimed, "you will readily comprehend what agony is mine at the thought that my only daughter is in the hands of those awful assassins."

"I do, indeed," assured Cody, as he grasped the baronet's hand, warmly. "It is hardly necessary for me to assure you of my heartiest sympathy. You have no clew to the direction the Artilows have taken?"

"Not the least, sir, although I have been stirring every moment since that terrible awakening on the prairie. I am told that the inn is usually moved at night, and that it avoids the road as much as possible."

"Yes, such is the case," confirmed Buffalo Bill, "and it also changes its name constantly, never being known by the same name in more than one place. Another thing, the inn being portable, it is frequently taken in pieces and stowed in some cave or ravine, where it could be discovered only by chance. This is the way the Artilows have so successfully avoided the pursuits of which they have more than once been the object. The one fact which stands out in your adventure, Sir Francis," he added, "is that the rascals did not drug you and your daughter to *kill*, but simply to render you *unconscious*. Their usual rule is quite the reverse, their practice being to make sure work of every one who falls into their hands. How about your money?"

"They stripped me of all my ready cash," replied the baronet, "and even took my watch and a gold pencil; but my letters of credit and other papers were not disturbed. Not getting any trace of these miscreants, and hearing that you were expected hereabouts from one moment to another, I have availed myself of Mr. Pilot's kind offer to conduct me hither, in the hope that you will give me your advice and assistance in this awful affliction."

"Many thanks, Sir Francis," replied the ex-scout, "for the honor you have done me in thinking of me in this connection. My old friend here," and he indicated Jack Pilot, "has asked me to lay over at Green River, for purely personal and monetary reasons, and my first idea was to refuse. But, since I've heard your painful story, Sir Francis, the matter presents itself to me in a different light. The question is no longer one of pecuniary gain. A young lady is in the most terrible peril which possibly can befall her. The theory I at once adopt is that Bradd Artilow was struck by your daughter's beauty, and that he will leave no step untaken, no stone unturned to force her into an acceptance of his hand in marriage."

The baronet groaned again.

"No doubt the villain has formed some such project as this," he declared. "You have resolved, then, to grant my prayer?—to make a halt at the Green River Station, Mr. Cody?"

"Yes, with pleasure, Sir Francis. My interest in the 'Land and Cattle' is not a great one, but I am really bound to know what has become of your son, and give him aid if he needs it. Strange that his principal herder, Dick Forrester, whom you really ought to know, he being one of the most splendid young fellows in the world—strange, I say, that Dick, who is known as the 'King of the Cowboys,' and also as 'Daredeath Dick,' has not come to the front in this matter! Ten to one Dick and your son are in some tight place together, if still alive, but I am not without fears—to be frank with you, Sir Francis—that both of them have been murdered. Be that as it may, I will come to a halt at Green River, and not put our Show on the road again until we have found the solution of all these weighty questions!"

At this assurance the baronet broke down completely.

It was a minute before he could express his thanks otherwise than by wringing the hand of Buffalo Bill, and it was only during this interval that the principal personages in the scene remarked that the train had long since resumed progress, and was bowling on its way more rapidly than ever.

"You can never know, Mr. Cody, what a load you have taken from my heart," said the baronet, with a sigh of relief, as soon as he could speak. "I am sure you will do all that can be done for my daughter and her brother. More,

I cannot for a moment doubt that you will save them and restore them to me!"

"All I can promise is the possible, Sir Francis," declared Buffalo Bill, with a kindly seriousness which comforted the afflicted father greatly. "We shall not succeed without a struggle! There are several of these Artilow scoundrels. One of the brothers is the chief of the Jay Hawks, a prowling band of red-skins and white outlaws which has been the scourge of this vicinity for a number of years. His predecessor in this dubious honor was an elder brother whom I helped to bring to the gallows. Still another brother is living under an assumed name as a rancher, although I have never been able to locate him exactly. From these few suggestions, Sir Francis, you will see that a job of no common size has been cut out for us."

The baronet assented in silence.

He was too deeply stirred for words by the magnitude and difficulty of the task which had so strangely and unexpectedly devolved upon him.

"As to my little affair, old pard," suddenly exclaimed Jack Pilot, "I've not a word more to say at present. The essential is that you're going to stop at Green River, and I've a sort of notion that all the rest 'll follow! Either my prophetic nose is turned the wrong way, or we're going to see considerable of a scrimmage hereabouts afore that lost gal's restored to the barrowite! Needless to add," he concluded, with flashing eyes, as he drew his weazeny form erect, "that Jack Pilot still counts one in a fight!"

While the friends, old and new, were thus preparing to acquit themselves of the duties devolving upon them, a sinister scheme had been concocted which was destined to prevent Buffalo Bill's "Special" from even reaching Green River—a scheme to which we must now give our attention.

CHAPTER III

THE JAY HAWKS AT WORK!

"COMING! coming! Buffalo Bill's coming!"

Such was the announcement of a man, who, mounted upon a fiery, coal-black horse, was dashing up a slope of the Green River Plateau at a furious gallop.

The words were addressed to a motley group of whites and Indians occupying the crest of a spur in the form of a peninsula which overlooked a prominent branch of the Green River.

This group of individuals was a portion of the noted band of outlaws known as the Jay Hawks.

The horseman was their leader.

"Sure?" called the lieutenant of the band, who seemed to hold his position by some right of seniority, he being at least three-score years of age, and as gray and wrinkled as a badger.

"Yes, Doc. As sure's my name's Rink Artilow!"

Another moment, and Rink had reached the crest of the spur, where he threw himself lightly from his saddle, becoming the center of the excited assemblage formed by his followers.

"Yes, Bill's on his way east'ard," resumed Rink, after relinquishing his horse to one of his men. "He's due at Green River Station at eight o'clock, so that we have barely time to make our preparations to ditch him!"

"You're resolved, then?" said the Doctor, otherwise the lieutenant.

"Resolved, man?" retorted Rink, with a frown which caused his huge eyebrows to nearly shut out the daylight from his eyes. "Has it not been understood, for weeks past, that we'd ditch the whole Wild West Combination on its way east'ard? Don't you know that I've sworn to have a full and complete revenge upon Buffalo Bill for sending my older brother to dance upon nothing?"

"Agreed and settled," returned the Doctor with a heartiness which showed that his query had not been prompted by opposition. "But why don't you plunge the whole train into the canyon at the bridge over the Black River?"

"For the best of reasons, my dear Doc, as you shall hear," answered the leader of the outlaws. "Buffalo Bill's returning from a grand tower on the Slope, during which he has exhibited mor'n three hundred times, and I hear he's got mor'n half a million dollars in hard cash aboard the train with him!"

"Half a million!" gasped the Doctor, and there his powers of speech failed him.

"You see, therefore, old man," resumed Rink Artilow, "that if we were to ditch the 'Special' in the canyon of Black River, we should either lose this half-million, or have more trouble to fish it out o' the wreck than it's worth!"

"In course—in course!" assented the Doctor.

"Then what are we to do?" pursued the chief. "Listen, my lads, and I'll soon illuminate this darkness. There's only one way of doing this little job in No. 1 style. You know the Black River Divide? There's a cut there just about deep enough to keep the cash from spilling into the surrounding fields. There's not a herder or a rancher within half a dozen miles—not a house or a barn. Well, this is our plan. We'll pile a lot o' ties on the track at that point, or roll on a few rocks, or take up a length o' rail—it matters little which. The one result to attain

is to ditch the 'Special,' and any of the measures indicated 'll surely do it!"

"But supposing Buffalo Bill shouldn't be killed by ditching him?" suggested the cautious Doctor.

"Killed?" returned Rink, with a scorn he could not wholly conceal. "I'd bet my bottom dollar that Buffalo Bill 'll not so much as lose a front tooth or put a finger out o' joint by the operation! That man has more lives 'n a cat! How many times he's been blown up, waylaid, shot, stabbed, drowned, and possibly buried, I've no means o' knowing, but 'twould make the stars o' heaven blink in their courses to undertake to count 'em!"

"Then what's to be the outcome of your proposed revenge?" queried the Doctor.

"I'm coming to that," explained the chief. "The minute the train comes to a stop, Buffalo Bill will come bounding out, like a tiger out of a jungle, to see what's the matter, and then's the time to nab him. First, as they come buzzing out o' the cars, red-skins and all, like hornets out of their nest, we'll pour in a volley from our rifles, killing as many as we can. Then, if Bill shows up in person out o' the wreck and smoke, we must get a lasso around him, and drag him off as neatly as any of his cowboys ever dragged a dead steer out o' the ring!"

The suggestion met with general approval and produced a marked sensation.

Some of the outlaws were enthusiastic enough to already see Buffalo Bill coming into their midst at the end of a lasso!

"My idea is, you see," continued Rink, "to take the man alive! And once in my hands, won't he wish the b'iler had bust'd and given him a lift to kingdom come before I got hold of him! Oh, I'll have a terrible revenge!"

And Rink Artilow rubbed his hands together gleefully in anticipation of triumph.

"He'll wish he'd never been born! Perhaps I'll starve him, perhaps I'll give him a ride in the style of Mazeppa, or possibly I'll tie him to a pine where a few of those wolves we hear every night 'll find him! Leave all that to me, boys! You may be sure that I shall find a suitable method o' getting square with him."

The speaker dropped into an easy and picturesque attitude on the brow of the cliff, and for a moment, as he contemplated his dire vengeance, he seemed oblivious to all around him.

"But—the job's not yet accomplished," ventured the Doctor, after an interval of profound reflection.

"No; but it is about as good as done," responded Artilow, arousing himself. "You and I, with a few others, can handle a lasso as well as any of those infernal cowboys, and I do not see why we should be doomed to failure."

"And the money, cap'n? How's it to be divided?" asked the lieutenant.

"Precisely as we have always divided our plunder," replied the chief. "One strong pull, all together, and we shall have as much money as we can carry."

He looked at his watch and added:

"We shall need to leave here in half an hour. Make your arrangements accordingly. Half a dozen lassos will be sufficient, but every man of you had better take a rifle and revolver."

"Of course we shall leave a guard at the cave?" queried the lieutenant.

"Of course," answered Rink, with severe emphasis. "Do you want some prowling prospector to arrive in our absence and discover all our secret? As to the rest—"

He lowered his voice to a whisper, addressing the remainder of his remarks to the Doctor only.

"I comprehend," was the answer.

We need not pause to detail how the half-hour indicated was passed by the Jay Hawks.

It is enough to say that their principal attention was given to eating and drinking—especially the latter, as if they were anxious to lay in a good stock of strength and courage for the work before them.

An hour later, at the Black River Divide, the point indicated by Rink Artilow, a dozen disguised men, all armed to the teeth, set about the task of blockading the track of the Union Pacific with the intention of ditching the approaching "Special."

Their horses were secreted in the adjacent forest in the care of a strong reserve.

The spot for the work of destruction had been well selected, it being at a somewhat sharp bend and at a cutting of sufficient depth to prevent the engineer and fireman from seeing the obstruction until the engine was close upon it.

Their arrangements all made, Artilow and the Doctor walked to and fro on one of the shaded banks and discussed their plans and prospects.

"It will be almost dark when they arrive," at length remarked the outlaw chief, and here are plenty of bushes to give us necessary concealment. There are some forty of our men in waiting, I suppose?"

"Forty-two, sir, without counting you and me and those in charge of the horses."

"Then we ought to have an easy victory. Let's take up our stations and be ready," and he glanced at his watch again. "The Special cannot be far distant."

The two men had scarcely placed themselves in concealment when a familiar roar began echoing in the tree-tops above them.

"There they come!" cried Artilow. "Kill all you can, boys! The more we kill at the first volley, in the first moments of confusion, the surer we shall be of that half million!"

Nearer and nearer came the train, the rush and roar of its wheels resounding louder and louder, and in a few moments more it was near enough for its watchful engineer to see the obstruction on the track, despite the twilight shadows in which it was enveloped.

To reverse the engine, whistle the breaks down, and ring out an alarm on the bell, were all the measures that could be taken, and how vain they were.

Then came the grand crash!

The locomotive and engine left the rails, turning over, and then came to a full stop, where they were half-buried in another moment by the wrecks of the cars telescoped upon them.

Such cries and groans as came from the ruins!

Such shouts and exclamations!

Then cowboys, Indians, ponies and steeds, all blending in one mass, began to surge into view from the shattered cars.

"In line, men!" called a voice of thunder. "This way! Charge those bushes! Fire! Fire!"

The voice was that of Buffalo Bill, and with what energy was it obeyed.

In a moment a score of men, mostly cowboys and Indians, had leaped upon the very bank where the outlaws were concealed, and in another instant a fearful volley was poured into the lurking assassins.

As a matter of fact, Buffalo Bill had not traveled over half the continent with his Wild West Combination, without realizing that he might be "ditched" at any moment by some enemy or rival.

He had taken his measures accordingly.

Every man in the "Special" had been drilled elaborately for just such an occasion, and hence every man who came out of the wreck unharmed was ready for instant action.

How little Rink Artilow and his men were prepared for this state of things, is shown by the result, such of them as had been spared by that fatal volley taking to their heels.

A second volley was sent after them, and then Buffalo Bill and his men set about the task of clearing the wreck, so far as the task devolved upon them.

Connection was duly made with the wires beside the track, and news of the "accident" telegraphed in both directions, with all other necessary business.

It was found that there were some serious concussions to deplore, but no deaths.

Within another hour, and by the time night had fairly set in, Buffalo Bill had established his camp on the divide, in the midst of a magnificent stretch of prairie, and everything had become as quiet around him as if nothing had happened.

A wrecking train had arrived from Green River, and in another hour the track had been cleared, and was again in working order.

His tent having been pitched at the head of his camp, Buffalo Bill made his guests and companions comfortable within, and then sauntered forth alone to survey his surroundings.

He wanted to think, and to think without hindrance he wanted to be by himself.

That he had to thank the Jay Hawks for being ditched, he did not have the least doubt.

He knew only too well how much he was hated by all the Artilows.

"So be it," he ejaculated, after his return to camp, as he seated himself in front of his tent. "I'll take good care to make them regret stopping me here before I am done with them!"

Very naturally he sunk into a reverie concerning the events of the day, becoming lost to all consciousness of his surroundings.

So thoughtful and abstracted, in fact, that he did not notice that Rink Artilow and the Doctor had recovered from their first fright, smuggling themselves into camp, and were now creeping toward him stealthily, each of them with a lasso coiled in his hand, in readiness for use.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WILD WEST TREASURE-CHEST!

As if warned by some strange instinct of his impending peril, Buffalo Bill suddenly arose, and turning, entered his tent, where sat Nate Salisbury, while Jack Pilot and Sir Francis Pollock strolled through the camp.

Rink Artilow smothered a curse.

His project of lassoing the hero of the Wild West seemed thwarted.

There was even something in this brusque retreat that struck the leader of the Jay Hawks disagreeably—so disagreeably, in fact, that he beckoned to his lieutenant and led the way out of the camp, nervous, annoyed and apprehensive.

"I don't like that," he muttered, as he came to a halt under the first convenient cover, which proved to be a group of stunted pines—"his beating a retreat in that style, I mean. I fancy he has seen us, and even divined our project."

"It's possible," admitted the Doctor, "but hardly probable. If he had seen us, he would have raised an alarm and sprung toward us."

"That's where you're mistaken," declared the leader of the Jay Hawks. "You can't tell what Buffalo Bill'd do in any given circumstances. You mustn't judge him by yourself. He's likely to do the very contrary of what you expect."

"Well, we needn't care," continued the lieutenant. "To be sure, he has given us a lesson. It seems that he had considered the eventuality of being ditched, and taken his measures accordingly. No doubt the engineer's whistle told him of the obstruction—possibly of the ambushade. In any case, his prompt action took us aback. We were momentarily paralyzed, notwithstanding our lassoes and rifles and elaborate intentions, and when we at last became capable of movement, we were naturally moved out of the way, without waiting to be counted. But there is still a chance for us. It is something that we have such a friend as Buskirk in the enemy's ranks. No doubt—"

The conversation was interrupted at this point by the reappearance of Buffalo Bill, who came out of his tent and sauntered toward the nearest sentry, whose beat was immediately in front of the tent, and not more than five or six rods from it.

There was little to distinguish this man from an ordinary frontiersman, except that he was dressed in a dandified manner and had a nose which suggested, by its color, both high living and hard drinking.

He was one of eight men to whom the care of the camp had been confided.

"Seen any of the enemy hanging about the camp, Buskirk?" asked Buffalo Bill, apparently careless in voice and mien.

"No, sir."

"Nevertheless, I believe they are near us. They will doubtless attempt to smuggle themselves into the camp before morning, to rob us, stampede our horses, or even kill us!"

"No danger o' that, sir," assured Buskirk, glibly, looking away keenly into the surrounding shadows, as if to assure himself that his words were not visibly negated. "They've had too lively a reception already to wish to come again."

If the fellow had been more alive to the situation he would have remarked how significantly the hand of Buffalo Bill toyed with the handle of his revolver, even to the extent of drawing the weapon half out of his pocket.

He would have seen, too, that his employer was singularly stern and observant.

"Well, you can't be too watchful," said the great plainsman, as he turned to saunter back to his canvas dwelling, not without looking into the adjacent shadows even more sharply than Buskirk had done. "As I have already mentioned, we are beset by enemies who will spare no trouble to run us under."

As he vanished into the tent again Buskirk looked after him with features about as expressive of cunning and anticipated triumph as of malignancy.

"For once, my fine fellow," he muttered, "you're in a fair way to be caught napping!"

If he had followed the chief of the Wild West to the privacy of his own tent he would have quickly modified this conclusion.

"The traitorous hound!" were the first words he would have heard uttered.

"What's the trouble?" asked Nate Salsbury.

"That Buskirk is a villain and a traitor, as well as a liar and fiend," explained Bill, as he proceeded to close the entrance of the tent, to convey the impression that he was about to retire for the night. "He saw the two intruders with the lassoes in their hands, and he as distinctly saw them retire. Where did we pick up the rascal?"

"In New Orleans, not long after our wreck on the Mississippi," replied Nate Salsbury, as he advanced to the entrance of the tent and looked out upon the incriminated man. "Now I recall the fact, his old tramping-ground is hereabouts! He told me so himself!"

"I see! He's among friends!" commented Buffalo Bill, with a countenance which would not have been particularly attractive to Buskirk at that moment. "His plan is to betray us into the hands of the Jay Hawks, as far as he is capable of it. We must keep an eye on him. Let's get into the 'false pocket,' Nate, and see what the next hour brings forth!"

The "false pocket" in question was a space about two feet in depth occupying one whole side of the tent.

It was formed by two "walls," an inner and an outer one, so that the tent was really two feet wider on the outside than was the apparent space within it.

This "false pocket" had long been one of Buffalo Bill's pet precautions and conveniences.

Snugly stowed away in this vacancy, upon a lounge or otherwise, he could hear without being seen, and make himself visible or invisible at will.

"We had better be ready for business," said Salsbury, as he took possession of a favorite rifle. "It's hardly to be supposed that the men who placed that obstruction on the track are intending to leave us in peace."

He stationed himself in a corner of the nook indicated,* and Buffalo Bill, after stepping outside to say a few words to another trusted associate, joined him in silence.

The two men had been in their place of concealment about half an hour, when there was a very suggestive rustle of leaves at the entrance of the tent.

Taking advantage of two of the "spy-holes" which had been deftly arranged in the inner or false wall of the tent, they hastened to survey the apartment in question, with the aid of a small lamp Buffalo Bill had left hanging to one of the uprights sustaining the ridge-pole.

What they saw did not at all surprise them.

Neither were they surprised to see that the intruder was the treacherous sentry!

Buffalo Bill having stepped out boldly by way of the entrance, when he spoke to one of his associates, as indicated, and having returned secretly under one of the side walls, Buskirk was under the impression that his employer was still absent, and had no particular apprehension of discovery, the more especially as he had temporarily made the Doctor a sentry in his place!

"Yes, there's a pile o' money here!" the intruder thought, after a brief but comprehensive survey of the objects around him. "The only difficulty's to say in which of these trunks and boxes it is! Most likely in the biggest—the solidest," and he proceeded to a more critical examination. "Probably this iron-bound trunk. Ah!"

He started violently, his face flushing hotly with delight.

What he had remarked was an end and an edge of a greenback, of the denomination of ten dollars, which was hanging out of the large trunk in question, not far from the lock, as if caught accidentally in that fashion at the moment when the trunk was last closed.

"Eh, old boy?" he resumed, with garrulous delight, as he rubbed his hands joyfully. "Did I not say so? That trunk is full of gold and greenbacks! It's the treasury of the Wild West Show! Must be a million in it!"

Seizing the handle at one end of the trunk, he hurriedly "hefted" it.

It was about all he could do to raise one end from the floor of boards beneath it!

"If 'twere lead now," he muttered, "I couldn't start it! But gold and greenbacks—that's another matter! A man can lift twice as much in money as he can lift in bricks! Two of us can readily carry it out of the camp to some retired spot, while some of the rest can bring a horse and wagon. What a prize! what a prize! I must hasten to get away with it!"

Again the rustle of leaves was heard, and the watchers comprehended that Buskirk had vanished.

He had withdrawn, in fact, to invoke the assistance necessary for the trunk's removal.

"Capital!" commented Buffalo Bill, as he emerged from his hiding-place. "This is the third 'dummy' which has attracted too much attention from the rogues since we started out with the 'Wild West' combination. That ten-dollar trick fetches 'em every time. The thieves will always regard that display of cash as an accident. It would never occur to them that our spare cash—and Heaven knows there's none too much of it!—reposes in one of those smaller trunks."

"Very true," returned Nate Salsbury. "If it wasn't for 'giving away' our secret, I'd like to let the rascals remove that trunk, just for the sake of the faces they'd make when they open it!"

"I'm going to let 'em go with it," the great plainsman smilingly declared.

"You are? Then we really ought to follow them. Is that your idea?"

"Not exactly," and Buffalo Bill's smile deepened, as he laid off his hat, coat, and vest. "Slip to the tool-chest, while I keep watch for the fellow's return, and bring me an inch auger and a quarter-inch bit, with the stock."

Salsbury glided from the tent upon this errand, but not without an eye and ear devoted to the absent traitor.

When Nate came back, he found the trunk in question empty, and Buffalo Bill crouching in it.

"You see nothing of Buskirk yet, I suppose?" demanded Cody.

* Says a writer in the New York World of July 16th, 1886:

"Nobody ever struck me with such a compact masculine force of character compounded of calm, storm and sunlight, as Nate Salsbury. Altogether he suggests to you a man who has been hammered together and condensed by great blows that got every weak fiber out of him. His strong, prominent features are the color of—well, did you ever notice that umbrous golden brown in a shady brook? Nate Salsbury has the color of a golden dusk among pinyon trees and gulches. There are scars on his face, and a bunch on his sinewy brown neck where a bullet passed through. He is not a large man, but every motion of his limbs and body conveys the idea of solidity and elasticity curiously but evenly compounded. So the Sioux who made him a chief call him 'little big man,' which is an Indian recognition in paradox of the obvious and the demonstrable."

"No. It's hardly time to expect him back. They'll have to bring a horse and wagon from some distance, since there's little likelihood that they'd enter upon a hasty division of the 'treasure' under our eyes. Doubtless we have a quarter of an hour in which to operate."

"A quarter of an hour will be quite sufficient for our purpose," said Buffalo Bill, as he seized the auger and began boring holes in the bottom of the trunk. "You watch for the villain's return, while I work."

Nate stationed himself at the entrance of the tent, and for the next few minutes nothing was heard save the crunch of the auger.

"There! that'll do for the bottom," at length ejaculated Buffalo Bill. "Now for a few smaller holes in the sides and top. Keep a sharp lookout, Nate. Don't let 'em get near enough unseen to see what I'm doing."

"All right," returned Nate. "But what are you doing?"

"You'll soon see, Nate."

And with this Buffalo Bill seized the bit and bit-stock and made a vigorous onslaught upon the cover of the trunk, selecting those points in the paneling where the holes were the least likely to be noticed.

"It's done," he finally remarked, as he swept his chips out of sight under his camp bed, concealing the auger and bit with them. "Of course I must put in a bite to eat and a drop to drink, as the journey may last several hours, or a day even."

"Food? Drink?" exclaimed Nate wonderingly, as his chief provisioned the trunk. "Oh, I see. You're going to shut Buskirk up in the trunk, and give him a free ride—"

"Not exactly," declared Buffalo Bill, in the same significant tones with which he had previously pronounced these words. "See anything of the rascals yet?"

Nate looked out again.

"Yes, Buskirk and another man are visible just outside of the camp, in the edge of the wood."

"There's no time to lose, then," said Buffalo Bill, stepping into the trunk nimbly. "Lock me up, Nate, and take good care to leave that greenback just as it was before—"

"Lock you up?" interrupted Salsbury, looking more startled than any man had ever before seen him. "What do you mean?"

"Simply that I am going to have a ride at the expense of Buskirk and his friends—"

"But they may carry you to their headquarters," protested Nate earnestly—"to some cave—"

"So much the better. I shall discover their secrets."

"But there'll be a dozen or a score of them around when the trunk is opened," continued Nate, with an earnestness which showed how little he approved of the project.

"So much the worse for at least three or four of them," declared Buffalo Bill, as he stored a second revolver on his left hip. "Lively, Nate. My mind's fully made up. Shut me up instantly. If I am not comfortable, I can tell you so without the least trouble."

Nate knew his chief too well to offer any further opposition, and in another moment he had shut down the lid and turned the key.

"Pretty close, eh?" he asked.

"Rather a tight fit, naturally enough," replied Bill from the trunk, "but I can endure it—for a short time at least. Pity I can't lock the trunk on the inside, so as to let myself out as soon as the captivity becomes too much for me."

"Are you fully resolved?" asked Nate.

"Hadn't I better let you out?"

"No. Here is a 'Jack-in-the-box' they little dream of. Look out and see what Buskirk is doing now."

There was a brief interval of silence, and then Nate whispered:

"They're coming. They've disguised themselves as much as possible by turning up their collars and slouching their hats—a proceeding which gives me an idea. Caution, now. Here they are!"

Nate had barely time to conceal himself anew in the "false pocket," when Buskirk and the Doctor crept into the tent, followed by Rink Artlow, all of them exhibiting a boldness which attested how great was their greed.

"Sure we can get away with it?" asked Artlow.

"We can at least try—and woe to anybody who gets in our way," answered Buskirk, doggedly. "Here goes!"

He seized one end of the trunk, while the Doctor seized the other, and led the way rapidly out of the tent, Artlow, revolver in hand, bringing up the rear.

Not another word was uttered, not the least halt made, until the trio with their burden had reached the cover of the group of small pines to which we have made allusion.

"There's a pile of it, that's clear enough," then said the lieutenant, as he relinquished his hold of the trunk. "For once we're in luck."

"Let me relieve you," proposed Artlow. "It will not do to lose a minute here. The absence of the trunk may be detected at any moment."

He took hold with such energy that a hundred yards was speedily left behind him.

Then he halted, panting with his exertions, choosing as thick a covert for the purpose as the forest afforded.

"No alarm yet," he muttered. "Run and fetch the wagon here, Buskirk, or as near to this spot as you can."

Buskirk hastened to obey, immediately vanishing from the view of his associates; but he did not go alone.

Close behind him came Nate Salisbury, with the countenance of a Nemesis.

At a given moment, just as the traitor came within view of a pair of horses hitched to a stout farm-wagon, his throat was suddenly encircled by a grasp which appalled him.

"The least noise and you die!" enjoined Nate, in a tone of deadly menace. "No resistance."

The prisoner did not dare disobey.

He was quickly gagged and bound.

Then Nate made his way to the wagon, sprung into it, without a word to the man in charge of it, and drove rapidly to the spot where the trunk was standing.

"Quick!" he enjoined, imitating the voice of Buskirk to perfection, as he leaped out. "In with it!"

He helped lift the trunk into the wagon, and climbed in after it, leaving Artilow to seize the reins and drive whither he would, the lieutenant sitting beside him and watching.

Not a minute had passed, as the wagon rolled quickly away, before Artilow and the Doctor began to exchange noisy congratulations over their success, and then Nate put his lips to one of the diamond-shaped patches of holes Buffalo Bill had bored in the top of the trunk, and whispered:

"I am here! Have substituted myself for Buskirk! Whatever may happen, wherever they may take you, *I shall be there!*"

Buffalo Bill heard and comprehended.

His old-time comrade was not letting him go forth alone upon his dangerous mission.

Once more Nate Salisbury was beside his chief, as he had so often been before, ready to *conquer or die!*

CHAPTER V.

BUFFALO BILL'S STRANGE JOURNEY.

THUS far, the situation of Buffalo Bill in the "Treasure Chest" had not been particularly irksome.

He had no difficulty whatever about breathing, and his prison was not so cramped as he had expected to find it.

Reclining upon his left hip, with his head at the apex of the arched space afforded by the lid of the huge chest, he could readily change his position enough to secure the rest he needed.

His desire was to hold out until the outlaws had reached their destination.

What might he not discover!

The top and sides of the trunk were so perforated that he could hear all that was said near him, and even observe a good share of the movements around him.

He not only hoped to learn what had become of young Harry Pollock, the son of the baronet, and Daredeath Dick, the King of the Cowboys, but it seemed possible that he might get some trace of the missing girl, Adeline Pollock, and the strange wayside den, the "Flying Tavern," as the Artilow brothers must necessarily have more or less dealings and points of contact among themselves.

The horses of the robber chief were fresh and sound, the wagon as easy as stout, and the load a light one, consisting simply of three men, in addition to Buffalo Bill.

As was to be expected, therefore, the chief of the Jay Hawks, perched upon his commanding seat, with his lieutenant beside him, rolled jauntily away from the Wild West camp, with the "Treasure Chest," of which they had so easily taken possession.

They had no doubt whatever of having secured a vast haul of ready money, and their joy was as profound as their error.

Never before, in all their nefarious successes, had they experienced such a keen sense of triumph.

How busy their thoughts were already with their supposed "treasure!"

Rink Artilow had promptly decided not to share the booty with the band, inasmuch as they had not assisted personally in securing it, and this was also his intention with regard to his lieutenant and Buskirk.

And the gray and wrinkled old lieutenant—he was speculating as to the possibility of securing all the booty to himself by getting rid of his chief and the supposed Buskirk—no matter by what treachery and violence.

Old and somewhat incapacitated, he had realized that he might be superseded any day, and spend the remainder of his life in obscurity and privation.

How nice it would be, if, instead of such a dull and ordinary fate, he could secure all the booty to himself, and slip away to some distant scene, where he could set up as a gentleman of wealth and leisure, with horses and servants, and all the ease and luxury and dissipation to be procured by money!

It seemed to Rube Middleton—for such was the old outlaw's name—that the hour had come when it was incumbent upon him to "feather his nest" and "retire from business!"

Such were the themes which occupied the two Jay Hawks, and the earnestness with which they pondered them attested how completely they were deceived in regard to the contents of the mysterious trunk.

It is doubtful if they would have taken half a million of dollars for the contents of the chest, and allowed the purchaser to cart it off unopened!

All continued quiet behind them, as they thus rode away, absorbed in their sinister projects.

The route of the vehicle lying across unsurveyed and unappropriated lands, there was more or less motion and jolting, and ere long a rugged and uneven spot was reached where the wagon was considerably shaken.

Nate Salisbury, whose thoughts, it is needless to say, had been quite as busy as those of the two outlaws, leaned his elbow carelessly upon the top of the trunk, inclining his head to within a few inches of one of the patches of holes which were furnishing Buffalo Bill the air he needed.

"I can let you out, if the thing's getting too disagreeable," he whispered.

"No—not yet," returned Buffalo Bill.

"I will at least unlock the trunk," added Nate, suiting the action to the word, "and loosen the straps, so that you can pop out at any desired moment."

The proposition was very welcome.

Buffalo Bill felt that he could endure his close quarters much more patiently if he were able to get out of them at his own pleasure and convenience.

"It seems to me that you hug that chest pretty closely, Buskirk," observed Artilow banteringly, as he chanced to turn his gaze upon his supposed associate. "You like to hear the gold *chink*, I suppose?"

Nate did not deny the suggestion, but improved the opportunity of changing his position. He realized only too keenly that the two outlaws were capable of any treachery toward each other or himself, and he was not the man to allow them to get the drop on him.

After a somewhat slow and careful drive of a mile the wagon struck a trail that was fairly good, and began to make more rapid progress. For the first time during the drive Artilow drew a long breath of relief.

He began to see his way clearly to the possession of the undivided treasure.

"Let what will come," he ejaculated, "we have secured a good start. I hear no sounds of pursuit—not even an alarm. The Wild Westers are still ignorant of their loss. We shall get clear of them without firing a shot."

He looked around at the supposed Buskirk, and resumed:

"You can't imagine, old boy, how glad I was to see you again. We've often wondered what had become of you. How does it happen that you're traveling with the 'Wild West,' and how long have you been with it?"

Nate Salisbury hastened to furnish the desired information, taking care to make it agree with the history of the man he was personating.

"It's fortunate you were on guard to-night and that we were able to communicate unseen with you," declared Artilow, by way of final comment upon the particulars thus furnished. "You shall have as big a share of the money as if you had never been absent a single day from the band."

"You're very square," returned Nate dryly. "When's the money likely to be divided?"

"As soon as we reach our destination, if you like," answered Artilow, with assumed carelessness.

Another interval of silence succeeded, during which the wagon continued to roll onward.

It was broken by the beat of a drum—a call to arms—which suddenly resounded through the still night from the camp of the Wild West.

"Ah! they've missed the treasure-chest," cried Artilow excitedly. "They know now that for once they've been caught napping. Ha! ha! I'd like to see the face of Buffalo Bill at this moment. Eh, Buskirk?"

"I would indeed," avowed Nate, continuing to imitate the voice of the man he was representing.

"They may curse and howl all they like," added Artilow, with a grimace of malignant delight. "They'll be unable to overhaul us."

"Unless they have bloodhounds," supplemented the lieutenant.

"Or unless American Horse, or Rocky Bear, pick up our trail," suggested Nate, smiling contentedly under his slouched hat.

Nate knew that Buffalo Bill had left orders with Buck Taylor to sound the drum and simulate a general alarm at the right moment, just to confirm the outlaws in their belief that they had secured the treasure-chest of the Wild West Entertainment, and it amused him greatly to see how completely the Jay Hawks were taken in by this proceeding.

At the end of a few minutes more, Artilow snuffed the air intently.

"There's a fire somewhere," he muttered. "We're even beginning to get into its smoke."

"A large fire, too," observed the lieutenant, as he also snuffed the air. "In the direction we're going, isn't it?"

"Yes," replied Artilow, with keen glances ahead, and also with a keen preoccupation, as if he had important interests in the quarter indicated.

During the next half-hour, as the wagon continued to roll onward, very little was said, except by Nate Salisbury, who kept Buffalo Bill informed, by frequent whispers, of all that was transpiring around him.

The chief of the Jay Hawks seemed too anxious to make good his escape to have a thought of anything else, and he certainly drove with a care and daring that commanded Nate's respect.

His general course was to the southward, and every step carried him further into the almost untraversed central regions of the Green River Plateau.

"We're getting nearer to that fire," at length remarked Artilow, as he snuffed the air again. "The smoke is getting thicker. We're going to have trouble with it."

"I hope you know where you are, Rink?" returned Middleton, with a keen survey of his surroundings, "for I am as completely lost, and have been for several miles past, as if we were in the midst of the Desert of Sahara."

Artilow smiled contentedly, a little strangely, too.

"Yes, Rube, I know where we are," he avowed, "and whither we're going. You needn't have any anxiety on that score—not the least."

Again he gave all his attention to the task he had assumed, hardly uttering a remark until another hour had passed.

"They'll never catch us now," he then ejaculated, allowing the horses to take a more moderate pace. "How far are we at this moment, do you suppose, from Buffalo Bill's camp?"

"A long distance, Rink—perhaps twenty miles."

"At least twenty-five, Rube, and in one of the most lonely and unfrequented spots in the whole West," declared Artilow, with a sinister smile upon his averted face. "The horses are getting enough of it, to say nothing of ourselves. How much the smoke and heat have increased. It's easy to see that that there is a tremendous fire raging at no great distance ahead of us. It will be wise to investigate before advancing much further in this direction. We'd better come to a halt."

"What! *here?*" asked Middleton, with a surprise strongly inclining to suspicion.

"Yes," replied Artilow. "I don't wish to be caught in the great woods ahead of us, until we know where that fire is and how long it has been raging. There has been so little rain lately that everything is as dry as tinder, and a fire once started is sure to burn as long as there is anything combustible in front of it."

He drew rein as he ceased speaking, and leaped lightly to the ground.

The lieutenant was silenced, but not satisfied.

He believed his chief was halting for some purpose of his own—as was really the case—and not because he was afraid of the fire.

This was also the opinion of Nate and Buffalo Bill.

They had seen nothing alarming—nothing more serious than the smoke and heat, or the passage of a few birds and animals—and they resolved to keep an eye upon Artilow, believing that he had come to a halt for some villainous reason.

CHAPTER VI.

HOW ARTILOW FLANKED HIS LIEUTENANT.

THE smoke seemed to increase with every passing moment, and the heat to become more intense.

"As you see," resumed Artilow, with a keen glance around, "we're in a small valley, of a few acres only, with considerable hills on every side, except a gap through which we have reached it. Here is a stream of clear water to our left, and here's plenty of grass, too, both bunch and buffalo, to which the horses can help themselves."

"Shall we take them out of the wagon?" queried Middleton, as he descended leisurely from the vehicle.

"Yes. But we must tether them."

The horses were soon feeding quietly, each within the limits of a circle a couple of rods in diameter.

They had evidently seen too much of forest fires to be susceptible to them.

"The next thing is to start a fire behind us," then said Artilow. "Such a fire will not necessarily be ascribed to us, and it may even decide the Wild Westers not to pursue us in this direction."

Buffalo Bill and Nate were amused to see how this bugbear of pursuit still oppressed the mind of the robber chief.

Lighting one end of a long fuse, Artilow ran briskly across the little valley, the dry grass igniting as rapidly as the fire touched it, so that a single minute sufficed to start a swath of flame

a hundred yards wide, which instantly began moving in the direction from which the travelers had come.

How promptly this wall of fire left everything blackened and sear behind it, as far as the grass and lighter combustibles were concerned, can be realized only by those who have had experience with a burning prairie.

A large black spot soon presented itself to the gaze of the travelers, offering them an instant and safe refuge from any conflagration that might be sweeping down upon them from the windward.

"You have been here before, no doubt?" questioned Middleton, as he looked after the retreating flames to the leeward, and stepped into the blackened circle.

"Yes, at this very spot. In fact, I've more than once swung my hammock under the tall pines behind you."

Lighting a handful of leaves and twigs at the side of the blackened open space already developed, Artilow gathered bushes and branches enough to make a large fire, with the intention of turning aside bears or buffaloes or any other animals that might at any moment put in their appearance.

"There! you've only to keep it alive," he said to his lieutenant, "and we shall be guaranteed against being trampled to death, except in the case of the arrival of a large herd in a panic."

"And even then their tread, to say nothing of their crashing through the bushes, will leave us ample time to swing ourselves into the lower limbs of one of those pines," remarked the lieutenant. "I've been in that sort of fix more than once, although I hope never to be caught in another."

"See! Buskirk's asleep!" suddenly ejaculated Artilow, with a strange gleam of speculation in his eyes.

Such seemed indeed to be Nate's situation.

He reclined in the bottom of the wagon, in close proximity to the chest, but he was never more wide awake than at that moment.

"Shall we wake him up?" asked the lieutenant.

"Certainly not," and Artilow lowered his voice to a whisper. "Let him sleep. He has been on guard, you know. We can talk without taking him into our counsels."

Middleton nodded understandingly, at the same time throwing another handful of fuel on the fire.

"Look, Rink!" he then cried, with a startled glance around. "How strange!"

He waved his hand over piles of bleaching bones, broken and empty boxes, fragments of barrels, and the relics of half a dozen shattered and crumbling "prairie schooners" which strewn the valley.

"There must have been a great fight here, years ago," added the lieutenant.

"No, not a fight," said Artilow. "It was simply a massacre. A small party of Mormons were encamped here. They were on their way to Salt Lake City. I was one of those who surprised them while they slept. We killed them to the last man, woman and child, and not one of our party was hurt."

There was a slight stir in the wagon, as if the supposed sleeper were troubled with bad dreams!

"You couldn't have got much booty from such a crowd," remarked the lieutenant, watching the fire Artilow had kindled.

"Not much—no," acknowledged Artilow. "We killed 'em merely to discourage emigration into this region, which my brothers and I had just stocked with cattle and horses."

Both Buffalo Bill and his associate remembered the disappearance of the wagon train in question, and for the first time comprehended the nature of the fate by which it had been overtaken.

"I'm glad I helped to get one of the brothers out of the way," was Buffalo Bill's thought. "It wouldn't cost me a very great effort of the will to get rid of the others."

"In regard to this sleeper," suddenly observed Middleton, after a thoughtful pause, as he stepped nearer his chief, "I'll give you my views in all frankness. 'I do not see as we have the least call to share the booty with him.'"

"Not if we can avoid it," returned Artilow, in a whisper. "Considering the poor luck we've had for many a month past, I am decidedly of the opinion that we ought to keep all this booty to ourselves!"

"Shall we kill him now?" asked Middleton, abruptly.

"No—later, after we have had a good sleep, and just before we get ready to resume our journey!"

"But may he not kill us?" suggested Middleton.

"He'd hardly dare attempt it, unless he's greatly changed in his absence. No, Rube, we're two to one, and can get rid of him later—just as we're leaving. He'd be useful, you see, if any of the Wild-Westerns should happen to pick up our trail and follow it!"

"But ought not one of us to watch the treasure?"

"It's unnecessary," returned Artilow. "The trunk is too heavy to take wings and fly away.

Those logs are good for a couple of hours, and that is all the rest I want. Let's take a drink and get into the wagon and go to sleep. I am sure to wake up if any one should come upon us!"

"All right," returned Middleton.

As a matter of fact, the lieutenant did not intend to go to sleep. His idea was to keep awake and kill Artilow as soon as the latter should become oblivious of his surroundings.

"I find a drop of good brandy's a positive benefit in this night air," pursued Artilow, as he produced a flask from his pocket and extended it to Middleton. "Try it!"

"After you, captain," suggested the lieutenant.

His intention was to be wary. Drinking after Artilow, he reasoned, he could at least avoid being poisoned!

Before complying with the suggestion of his lieutenant, Artilow wheeled to the left a little, and bent a sharp glance upon the motionless figure in the wagon.

As if satisfied with what he saw, he then took a liberal dram from a flask he duly inverted.

There was no doubt about it. He not only drank, but drank freely, and it was without the least hesitation that Middleton accepted a flask from his hand and followed his example.

Nevertheless, he was not so wise as he supposed.

There were two flasks in the case, identical in appearance, but one of them contained a swift and deadly poison!

Having a well-defined although unobtrusive mark upon each, it was the easiest thing in the world for Artilow to manipulate them in such a way as to reserve one exclusively for himself and the other for his enemies and victims!

He had indeed so often made use of this murderous jugglery, in his intercourse with his fellow-men, that he had become quite expert in it!

"And now to sleep," he remarked, as he threw himself at full length upon the grassy sward near the fire. "How tired I am!"

"I can say as much," declared Middleton, as he took up a reclining posture at the side of his chief. "It has been a very busy and eventful day," and he yawned effusively. "I don't know when I've been so used up. Ah!"

He finished with a sort of wondering groan, at the same time glaring suspiciously at Artilow.

"What was that you gave me?" he yelled, rather than said, as he gained his feet convulsively.

"Brandy—same as I took myself. You drank from the same bottle I did."

"Yes—yes. And yet—my brain reels!" cried Middleton, grasping his temples with his hands.

"My stomach seems filled with liquid fire!"

"That's strange," commented Artilow, still reclining and speaking carelessly. "You see that I'm all right, so that the cause of your trouble cannot be in the brandy."

A moment Middleton struggled with his pains, his hands tearing at his stomach.

"Villain!" he then shrieked, turning a wild and horrified glance upon his chief. "You have tricked me. You mean to keep all that money to yourself. Help, Buskirk!" and he took several rapid steps toward the wagon. "Murder! Help!"

Then the thought of avenging himself seemed to strike him, and he faced about, drawing a revolver, but in such a slow and feeble way that Artilow merely smiled, without changing his position.

Another moment, and the lieutenant fell heavily forward upon his face.

The deadly poison had done its deadly work!

CHAPTER VII.

SALSURY'S SUBSTITUTE.

FOR a few moments Artilow remained motionless, with his hand upon his revolver, waiting to see if the cries of his victim had aroused the occupant of the wagon.

Then he smiled jubilantly, gaining his feet.

"One of the two is already out of the way," he muttered. "For at least the tenth time that 'bottle trick' is a success!"

Seizing the body of his dead lieutenant, he dragged it to one side, concealing it in a clump of bushes.

Then he listened intently, inclining his ear successively in various directions.

There was no necessity of shaping his thought in words. It blazed from his wicked eyes!

He would assure himself that none of the Wild West people were upon his trail—no one near him—and then he would finish his work!

He was resolved to remain the sole possessor of the supposed treasure.

He glided away, as swift and light of foot as a tiger, soon vanishing beyond the circle illuminated by the fire he had kindled.

In an instant Nate Salsbury was out of the wagon and crossing the open space to the spot where the body of the dead lieutenant had been concealed.

To convey it to the wagon and leave it where he himself had just been lying, was for Nate a short and easy task.

He had not only observed the proceedings of Artilow closely, but he comprehended them.

He well knew that he himself was now menaced!

Sending a keen glance in the direction Artilow had taken, Nate Salsbury hastened to raise the lid of the trunk.

"You can come out a minute, Bill," he said. "We shall have a moment to ourselves."

Buffalo Bill did not need to be told twice.

He stepped out of the "Treasure Chest" and stretched his limbs and body in a manner which attested how glad he was to secure even this momentary respite from the fatigue his cramped quarters had begun to cause him.

"Where's Artilow now?" he asked, surveying the lurid scene the fire presented.

"He has gone back a short distance to assure himself that no one's near," replied Nate.

"Doubtless he'll be back here in a few moments to make away with me also; he's playing a lone hand in this game for a dead certainty."

"And so you have substituted the dead man for yourself?" pursued Buffalo Bill. "I see your game! You'll let Artilow get rid of that body under the supposition that he's getting rid of you! And what then?"

"Either he'll stay here a few hours," declared Nate, "or else he'll hitch up immediately and drive to his destination, whatever may be its exact nature."

Buffalo Bill reflected intently a few moments.

"In either case," he then said, "we have no reason to be discouraged. If Artilow is resolved to have all the 'treasure,' he'll come back here and riddle this body with balls, thinking he's killing Buskirk, and then go to sleep in the wagon, or else he'll resume progress toward his retreat. Whichever course he may take, there'll be time for you to release me later, or for me to take care of myself. In any case, you may lock me up again!"

Nate protested against this measure by an energetic shake of the head.

"I don't like to do it," he declared.

"And you may be sure that I don't like to be locked up," acknowledged Cody. "It's possible that you may get into trouble, while I'm in that fix, and I shall be powerless to help you. Nevertheless, as nothing's to be had in this world unless you set your traps to catch it, I'm disposed to run all these risks for the sake of getting hold of more of this man's secrets. He's sure to take me somewhere, and he's sure to open the trunk promptly. Possibly I shall make a discovery of great importance. Lock me up again, Nate, and get to cover!"

Down went the lid of the trunk, cutting short all further remonstrances, and Nate could do no less than obey orders, as much as he distrusted the situation.

He had scarcely concealed himself in the adjacent bushes when Artilow was seen striding back toward the wagon, his boots and pantaloons covered with ashes.

"It's as I supposed," muttered the villain. "There is no one within twenty miles. Now's the time for action!"

Gaining the wagon, he discharged his revolver rapidly three times at the motionless figure therein.

As he had aimed the first shot at the head, he was not at all surprised that there was neither outcry nor movement.

His intention had been to prevent either.

Springing into the wagon, he threw the body out, and dragged it away to the nearest cover—a spot not far from where he had previously left his victim.

"It's done!" he cried, jubilantly. "The treasure is now mine alone! No more talk of division! No more danger that the chest will be traced to me! I will take it to my secret retreat!"

With what delight he sprung into the wagon again, and estimated the weight of the trunk by lifting one end of it, will be readily imagined.

"What a pity it is that I haven't the key!" he ejaculated. "I'm tempted to break open the trunk now and count the money. Oh! I'm the boss bonanza king now!"

Buffalo Bill smiled, contentedly, congratulating himself that this bonanza king was but a boss buzzard after all.

For nearly a minute Artilow wrenched the lid and lock of the trunk from side to side—long enough to assure himself how stout they were, and then he desisted, without remarking how intently Nate had been watching his every proceeding from the clump of bushes in which he had taken refuge.

"Second thoughts are the best, after all," decided the jubilant villain. "I must go slow and be patient. It'd take me all night to count so much money. Besides, this is not the place for my bonanza."

He looked around nervously, as if thoughts of his victims had obtruded themselves, and then leaped nimbly to the ground.

The horses were tired, as he had said, but their brief rest had been beneficial, and he knew they were quite capable of completing the journey upon which he had entered.

He had caught one of them, when the other, with that awkward perversity of which all

horsemen have had experience, suddenly tossed head and tail, and sprung away at full gallop, breaking its tether and quickly vanishing in the direction from which he had come.

Naturally enough, Artilow experienced a thrill of dismay.

What if the fugitive should continue his flight to the robber camp.

Hitching to a tree the horse he had secured, Artilow reflected a moment as to his course.

Then, taking hold of the pole of the wagon, he backed the vehicle a couple of rods, leaving it in the shadow of several overhanging trees, so that any one might have entered the little valley without seeing it.

Next he cut several armfuls of pine branches and so covered the trunk with them that the wagon-box seemed loaded only with evergreens.

Then he lighted a cigar and sauntered away in the direction the fugitive horse had taken, affecting a calmness he was far from feeling.

He had no sooner passed from view than Nate unlocked the trunk and raised the lid again, briefly setting forth the situation.

"Clearly enough," he concluded, "Artilow will push on to his 'secret retreat,' as soon as he has secured that horse, and you can just as well make the rest of the journey under these bushes as inside of that trunk."

"That's true," returned Buffalo Bill. "Another thing, that dead man can now take my place in the trunk! He's somewhat lighter than I am; but we can make up the difference with stones!"

The suggestion was instantly acted upon, the body of Rube Middleton being transferred from the ground to the trunk, and then Buffalo Bill and Nate stowed themselves away in the wagon and waited, with a keen sense of satisfaction at the substitution they had effected.

"It's a fine job we've put up for Mr. Jay Hawk," observed Buffalo Bill. "He'll be considerably taken aback when he finds that dead man in the trunk, instead of the 'treasure' expected!"

CHAPTER VIII.

DAREDEATH DICK.

BUFFALO BILL had scarcely uttered the remark when a man came into view from the western side of the little valley, begrimed with smoke and ashes.

This man was moving at a weary pace, and led by the bridle a horse as jaded as himself.

In his right hand was a revolver in readiness for instant use, and his glances were singularly eager and anxious.

"Surely it's no illusion," came from his lips. "As strange and unaccountable as it seems, I'm sure I saw Buffalo Bill here a moment ago. I saw him in the full blaze of the fire, and cannot be mistaken. Hallo, there! Are you here, Mr. Cody?"

He came to a halt, sending keen glances in every direction around him, and listened intently.

Of course Buffalo Bill and Nate Salsbury had given the new-comer their best attention.

"Do you know him, Nate?" asked the former, in a barely audible whisper.

"No. Do you?"

"His voice and figure seem familiar, but I can't quite place him."

The call of the unknown was repeated, even more earnestly than before, and Buffalo Bill sprung out of the wagon and approached the fire, with Nate close behind him.

"Yes, I'm here, stranger," he answered, with an amicable nod, as the firelight fell upon his commanding figure. "You seem to be in trouble. What can I do for you?"

"You don't know me, then?" cried the new-comer, pocketing his revolver. "And no wonder! I'm greatly changed, Mr. Cody, since I had the pleasure of seeing you at the headquarters of the *Great Western Land and Cattle Company*."

"What! are you Daredeath Dick?" cried Buffalo Bill, with unmistakable surprise.

"Even so, Mr. Cody—or rather what is left of me," declared the new-comer, gloomily, as he extended a feeble and emaciated hand. "We've been having rough times since I saw you."

Buffalo Bill responded as feelingly as promptly to these greetings and then turned to Nate, with the remark:

"He's Dick Forrester, the young hero of whom we have so often spoken, and of course the name of Nate Salsbury is not unknown to him."

Nate not only greeted the youth warmly, but produced a silver-mounted flask from a side-pocket, and invited Daredeath Dick to take a drop from it, which invitation was gratefully accepted.

Dick Forrester had scarcely attained his majority, but his whole life had been passed upon the great plains, and he was familiar with every aspect of the wild life there presented.

He was one of the best of marksmen, scouts, hunters, riders and cowboys, as active as daring, as generous as brave, as gentle and sympathetic in friendship as he was terrible in his wrath.

As already indicated he came of a wealthy and prominent family.

His mother and sisters had more than once declared that they could not understand why he should pursue such an arduous and dangerous career upon the plains when he could live at home like a gentleman of wealth and leisure, and they had finally given up trying to solve the problem, contenting themselves with the hope that he would "settle down" as soon as he should meet the lady who was destined to become his "better half."

How nearly he had escaped death was now apparent in his every aspect and movement, his frame being almost as thin as that of a man in the last stages of consumption, but all the sufferings he had endured could not extinguish the ardor of his soul.

"We already know that you have been in trouble, Dick," resumed Buffalo Bill. "We learned the fact from Sir Francis Pollock, who has come from London to look up his son, Harry Pollock, from whom he has not had a line in three months. The baronet is at the Wild West camp at this moment."

"But how is it, Mr. Cody, that you happen to be here?" asked Daredeath Dick, as he accepted a cracker from Nate and began munching it.

Buffalo Bill briefly narrated how he had been ditched by the Jay Hawks, and how Artilow, with the aid of the treacherous Buskirk, had carried off the "dummy" treasure chest, with the subsequent events we have just recorded.

"As you see from all this," concluded Buffalo Bill, "Artilow may be back here at any moment, but he may also be absent several minutes, or even half an hour, as the runaway horse seemed really disposed to keep running. Be that as it may, if you will step under cover with us, we shall be glad to have a few details of your situation."

He led the way into the dense bushes overlooking the fire, taking care to keep in view the spot where Artilow was likely to appear.

"Of course you know that our company has been all broken up, Mr. Cody," began Daredeath Dick, as he dropped into an easy attitude upon a projecting rock, "and it is to this same Artilow that we are indebted for this state of affairs. He came swooping down upon us without warning like lightning from a clear sky, with a score of his followers, one fine morning more than three months ago, while we were herding near headquarters. He may have been acting for himself, but I think he was merely the catspaw of the *Green River Live Stock Company*, of which a certain Judge Clipperton is the manager, as a good share of our cattle seem to have fallen into their hands and been run off to market by it."

"This is not the first time I have remarked a point of contact between the Jay Hawks and the *Green River Company*," commented Buffalo Bill thoughtfully. "In a word, Artilow seems to execute what Judge Clipperton plans. But go on."

"You can imagine how warmly we repelled the assault upon us," proceeded Daredeath Dick, "but what could we do? Harry and I had only four cowboys to help us, and one of these was a 'tenderfoot,' but we killed seven of the assailants, and wounded half the others, more or less severely, before we thought of an adjournment. Two of our cowboys were killed, and the other two wholly disabled. Harry had received four or five ugly wounds, and had lost so much blood that he was helpless. My condition was scarcely better. One of our two surviving cowboys managed to creep away into some bushes and hide, and the other secured from the enemy a horse whose saddle we had emptied, and was so fortunate as to make good his escape. I succeeded in mounting Harry upon one of our best horses and away we went for life, having no desire to exchange our lives at any odds against such creatures as were assailing us. We were pursued of course, but we dropped two of the pursuers in such style as to discourage the rest, and at last got clear of them."

"Pity we were not there, Nate," was Buffalo Bill's comment. "What next?"

"We lost our cattle, of course," continued Daredeath Dick, after taking another swallow of brandy and accepting another cracker. "A large number of them were driven into the camp of the Jay Hawks, several hundred distributed among the nearest Indian reservations, as many more given to a wandering band of 'hostiles,' and the balance incorporated with the herds of the *Green River* people. All this attention to our stock was a good thing for Harry and myself, in some respects, as it rendered the pursuit less active. We stopped at the first suitable spot we reached, and began patching ourselves together. Harry was in such a bad way that I believed he would die unless I secured help, and in due course I rode away in that intention. The sun was burning hot. I was weaker than I thought, and I fainted and fell out of the saddle twice in quick succession. After a long and desperate struggle to get through, I came to a little tavern, of odd construction—"

"Ah!" ejaculated Buffalo Bill, with an air of comprehension.

"You're right, Mr. Cody," resumed Daredeath Dick, with a significant smile. "It was the 'Flying Tavern.' Of course I was 'taken in and done for' by these illustrious members of the Artilow tribe, and then followed a blank of five weeks."

"Five weeks!" echoed the listeners.

"Yes, my friends," assured Dick, with a sigh. "Those scoundrels had drugged me to kill, but my strong constitution had pulled me through. After lying two days on the prairie, I was found by a party of hunters, and received the kindest attention, although I was out of my head and could give no account of myself, and for weeks I was as tenderly cared for as if I had been in the hands of a brother. One of the men in the party had recognized me, it seems, and I had formerly rendered him what he was pleased to call a great service."

"It was a narrow escape," observed Buffalo Bill. "But what of Harry Pollock?"

"You do not need to be told," answered Daredeath Dick, "how quickly, after I came to my senses, I hastened, with good escort, to the spot where I had left Harry. He was gone, of course, and from that hour to this I have not had the least trace of him. Probably he was found by the Jay Hawks and killed."

"Poor Harry!" sighed Buffalo Bill. "I forgot to tell you that his sister came over here with Sir Francis. While on their way to your late headquarters, the father and daughter put up for the night at the 'Flying Tavern.' The next thing the baronet knew, he found himself lying alone on the prairie, about two o'clock in the morning, and his daughter had vanished, as had the inn and all its belongings."

"What a horrible experience! He has not recovered his daughter?"

"No, and it's doubtful if he will readily, as there is a young scoundrel in the case—Bradd Artilow by name—who will doubtless take a liking to the girl and make every effort to retain her captive. As you see, the situation of affairs for Sir Francis is simply terrible. But what are you doing now?"

"What I have been doing ever since I recovered my senses," replied Daredeath Dick, with a gloomy smile, "looking for Harry and the 'Flying Tavern.' I've about given up all hope of seeing Harry again, but I feel, I know, that I shall sooner or later encounter the man-trap which so nearly cost me my life. For the moment, I am on my way to a friend's to get a new horse and a few necessary supplies."

"You needn't go further than our camp for anything you want," said Buffalo Bill, with an attentive eye and ear to the quarter from which Artilow was expected, "and I doubt not you will be glad to join Sir Francis in his search for his daughter."

"Most assuredly," assented Dick.

"Then here's a line to him," pursued Buffalo Bill, handing Dick a slip of paper on which he had written a few words while speaking. "He will be very glad to have such assistance as you alone can give him."

He added all the necessary details and directions, and Daredeath Dick declared that he would be at the Wild West camp as soon as his jaded steed could make the journey.

"Of course you can pull out of this valley without encountering Artilow, and you will have no trouble whatever in reaching our camp," was Buffalo Bill's final remark. "It's impossible to say just how soon we shall return, as we're determined to see the end of the ride upon which we've entered, but we shall doubtless be back in the course of the coming day. Good-by, Dick, and good luck go with you!"

Nate Salsbury joined in these good wishes and Daredeath Dick took his departure, while the two representatives of the Wild West returned to their hiding-place in the robber chief's wagon.

"We're fortunate to have met him," remarked Buffalo Bill, looking after Dick. "He'll be of the greatest assistance to us in the search for Harry and his sister, or in any other work that may devolve upon us. But how hot it's getting here," he added, as he glanced into the murky sky and wiped the perspiration from his face. "That fire is evidently advancing in this direction. If Mr. Jay Hawk don't return soon, we shall have to cool ourselves in the brook—"

"Caution!" enjoined Nate Salsbury, as a grand crashing of twigs and branches suddenly resounded at no great distance. "There he comes! No—Gracious heavens!"

"Thunder and lightning!" returned Buffalo Bill, in a startled whisper. "What a sight!"

And the two men crouched breathlessly in the bottom of the wagon, as if their very lives depended upon their quietude and silence!

CHAPTER IX.

WHITHER BOUND?

THE sight to which the exclamations of Buffalo Bill and Nate Salsbury referred was indeed of the most startling description.

It consisted of a number of enormous grizzly bears—the observers could not immediately see how many—which had been routed out of their mountain dens by the fire which had been rag-

ing during the afternoon and evening, and which had evidently been chased many a long league by it, enveloped in the fierce heat and smoke.

The hair of the frightened animals had been more or less ablaze, as was indicated by the patches which were visible here and there on their hides.

With their jaws and throats covered with froth and blood, their eyes glittering with pain and fury, their tongues swollen and protruding, their sides heaving with their panting breath, no more terrible spectacle than that they presented could have possibly been imagined.

They had evidently caught a glimpse of the charred space caused by the fire Artilow had kindled, for they were making the most desperate efforts to reach it, as if they had comprehended as well as any man that they would there find safety!

Their growls had almost ceased, as if their parched tongues had refused their office.

The foremost of the monsters made for the brook traversing the little valley, paying no attention to the horse of Artilow, which had promptly taken its flight.

Plunging into one of the deepest pools the brook afforded, the grizzly rolled and tumbled therein, burying his jaws in the refreshing element again and again, and lapping it with all the earnestness of a raging thirst.

He was soon overtaken by a second bear, who sought to appropriate the pool, and in another moment the couple had entered upon one of the most terrific fights the two observers had ever witnessed, tearing each other till the blood flowed in streams and discolored the water, and rending the air with their growls and labored breathing.

The other three bears—for such was now seen to be their whole number—were either less savage, or more prudent, or possibly less wild with heat and thirst, for two of them lay down in the brook several rods apart, while the last took his way, with many an inquiring sniff, toward the wagon in which the two friends were lying.

How still they kept, how little they thought of taking the offensive, need not be stated.

If the bears were not hungry, they were at least in a state of bodily pain, not to speak of terror and excitement, which would have caused them to attack any man at sight, and with a force and ferocity which would have rendered a victory over them a very difficult matter.

If Buffalo Bill and Nate had possessed all the rifles in the world, they knew too well the nature of a grizzly bear to have made the least effort to concentrate upon themselves the attention of these five monsters, especially at such a moment.

To their great relief the fifth bear was too hot and thirsty not to follow the example of the other four, and he was soon grunting his satisfaction from one of the deepest pools the brook afforded.

The air was getting hotter every moment, however, showing that the fire was advancing nearer, and already it seemed to be a question whether the two representatives of the Wild West must be roasted alive in their wagon or have a fight with the grizzlies.

But, suddenly, the bears raised their heads inquiringly and began regaining the banks of the stream, the two largest suspending their furious contest, and all looking in the direction from which they had come.

A noisy clatter of hoofs, a heavy trampling of feet had begun echoing from that quarter.

The air began to be filled with strange bellowsings and pantings, as with an extraordinary clash of movements, the very ground appearing to tremble under the approach of some monstrous cavalcade.

Nearer and nearer came this mighty rush and roar, and at length a score of buffaloes, headed by a shaggy patriarch of the herd, came pouring at full gallop into the ravine leading out of the little valley.

They were flanked and followed by more buffaloes than the watchers could have possibly counted, even if they had been favored with daylight.

How terrible they looked!

No one who has seen the surging of one of those living waves can ever forget it.

The creatures had been stampeded by the fire, and were in awful panic.

On! on! was the instinct which propelled them so madly.

Nothing could have stopped them.

A precipice a hundred or a thousand feet high would not have produced the least faltering in their ranks.

They would have poured over it as readily as the waters pour over Niagara.

It was well for Buffalo Bill and Nate that their wagon was not in a line with the advancing herd, but a little to one side, and somewhat sheltered, or they would have been compelled to take refuge in one of the nearest trees.

As it was, the terrible torrent poured past them, leaving them safe, and gradually lest itself in the distance.

"Well, there's a bright side to everything,"

cried Buffalo Bill, as he looked after the retreating buffaloes. "They've rid us of the grizzlies!"

It was even so.

At sight of the advancing herd, the bears had resumed their wild flight, and had long since vanished from the view of the watchers.

"We shall have to get out of this soon," resumed Buffalo Bill, as he surveyed the lurid gleams of light that were visible in the sky to the windward. "If Artilow does not show up soon—which is hardly to be looked for—we shall have to abandon our project of accompanying him to his destination!"

"That is easier said than done," returned Nate, as he waved his hand toward a gigantic buffalo which had humped into view, followed by a number of wolves, gray and black. "There are still too many stragglers about for me not to prefer to remain where I am until the last moment, when we will raise the wagon and draw it into the charred space yonder. To take this course will be to announce to Artilow the presence of intruders, and hence we will not take it until the heat and smoke can no longer be endured.

A couple of deer came dashing past, and a large flock of birds flew over in a body, followed by various winged stragglers, but the heat increased very slowly, as if the fire had ceased to find fuel, and the two men remained quiet in the wagon, anxious to carry out the purpose of their journey, if it were still possible to do so.

They were just in the act of discussing anew the necessity of beating a retreat, when Artilow, heated, excited, and begrimed from head to foot, was seen returning in possession of the fugitive horses.

To hitch up the pair was an easy task, and the robber chief hastily planted himself on the seat and started, driving out of the little valley in a course at right angles with that by which he had entered it, and thus partially making a circuit of the region in which the fire was still raging.

"You want to go, do you?" he cried, as soon as he had reached the open. "Now's your time to travel!" and he plied his whip upon the horse which had put him to so much trouble. "I've got you now where I can handle you. You may go as fast as you like. Here's another cut or two to help you. Glad to see you go so willingly. There!"

For a mile or two he had all he could do to retain his seat, so terrific was the pace with which the horses responded to his wrathful violence, and then he allowed them to moderate their exertions.

By this time he had turned the spot where the fire was raging, and crossed the line in which it was advancing, so that he had got clear of a great deal of the heat and smoke, and also of all danger of an encounter with the buffaloes and grizzlies his passengers had seen, but of which he did not seem to have any knowledge—as was natural enough, seeing how busy he had been with the recovery of his horses and how far they had led him.

Drawing a long breath of relief at these favorable circumstances, he struck a match and looked at his watch.

The hour was not so late as he expected to find it, after all his toils and delays, it being only a few minutes past midnight, and the fact seemed to be accepted as a good omen, and his mood became more pleasant and contented as his gaze at length settled anew upon the supposed "treasure-chest."

"At last! at last!" he ejaculated, in tones of the wildest joy, as the wagon continued to roll onward. "No one has seen me. No one knows that this vast fortune is now in my hands. I've long wished to retire from the Jay Hawk fraternity, and now's my chance."

Buffalo Bill and Nate exchanged comments under the bushes by which they were so neatly concealed.

Both were contented and hopeful.

It began to look now as if they would soon secure some positive results for their trouble.

By an occasional reference to the stars through the interstices of their leafy covering, they were able to make out that Artilow was still driving to the southward.

The scene around the wagon remained as lonely and wild as ever.

There was no longer the least trace of a route, but the men of the outlaw attested that he was perfectly familiar with his surroundings, and suggested that he had often traversed the same scene.

At length he halted, looking around and listening, with especial attention to the quarter from which he had come.

Not a sound came from any direction.

He believed that he was neither watched nor followed, and his jubilation increased.

"Yes, I'm clear of them—clear alike of the Wild Westers and the Jay Hawks," he muttered, as he resumed progress, "and I'll now have as little as possible to do with either. Henceforth I shall be known only by my other name, and shall figure only in my other character. With this fortune in my hands, I can give all my attention to *Althie* and to *love*!"

He sighed as softly as the zephyrs in the pines

above him, and rode onward in a fit of abstraction.

"Did you hear that?" whispered Nate. "What can he mean by his 'other name?' And who can 'Althie' be?"

"I haven't the least idea," was the reply. "I only know that we're in a fair way to learn his secrets. We'll stick to him, Nate, wherever he may go."

It was a singular and exciting ride that succeeded, and one full of weighty problems, especially for Buffalo Bill and Nate.

Whither was the robber-chief bound? and what discoveries would the watchers make when they reached their destination?

CHAPTER X.

ALTHIE.

A BEAUTIFUL abode in a beautiful solitude, with a setting of gardens, lawns, cultivated fields, pastures and murmuring brooks, and with shady groves and majestic forests in the background—such was the noble scene to which we now invite the attention of the reader.

This dwelling was far, far removed from the ordinary haunts of men and off the usual routes of travel, precisely as if its projectors had been desirous of avoiding all intercourse with their fellows.

The main edifice was at least forty feet in length by twenty-five in breadth, and two stories in height, with a square tower at one corner which overlooked the surrounding country to a great distance.

The wing alone, in which were the kitchen and other domestic apartments, would have been regarded anywhere as a comfortable and commodious abode.

There was a roomy stable and two or three sheds and other outhouses, in addition to a large farm, in the rear of the dwelling, but no other houses of any kind within many miles.

Unlike the terrible "flying tavern," this structure had been designed to remain permanently in one place, as was shown conclusively by the large cellar which had been placed under it.

The doors and windows were of ordinary size, workmanship and appearance, and were fitted with ordinary fastenings, showing that no attempt had been made to render them stronger than usual.

There were favorite haunts of robbers and red-skins at no great distance, if rumor could be trusted; but these disagreeable neighbors evidently possessed no terrors for the strange man who had built the solitary house and who resided in it.

This man was commonly called Judge Clipperton.

Whether of English or American descent, nobody knew.

He was known to a limited circle of acquaintances and associates as the president and resident manager of the *Green River Live Stock Company*.

In this capacity he had built the house in question, and stocked the surrounding solitudes with several thousand head of cattle under competent herders.

There were several men on the place, in charge of an overseer named Berrill, and a Miss Clipperton, an emaciated, wrinkled, hag-like woman, of fifty years, who was reputed to be the judge's only sister, and who made her home with him, looking after the house and taking charge of the household arrangements.

Curiously enough, Judge Clipperton was seldom seen at home.

In other terms, his absences were long and frequent, and no one pretended to know where he went, or what he did on these occasions.

A very singular man was Judge Clipperton, as is clearly demonstrated by these circumstances.

To have known much of him would have been to realize that there was some mystery about him.

He was tall and somewhat stout—almost Herculean, in fact, in his proportions.

He was also very strong and active for a man of his apparent age, having a grasp like iron, and a step like a tiger, although he possessed a long gray beard which descended upon his breast, while his hair was almost white.

Of his origin, history and personal relations he had never been known to speak.

About the middle of the afternoon preceding the ditching of Buffalo Bill's "Special," a young girl was walking to and fro, with an air of uneasiness, in one of several grape-arbors which occupied the principal garden of the premises we have described.

She was little more than a child in years; but her features displayed the wisdom and strength of a woman.

Her figure was supple and delicate without being slight, and her movements indicated that blended grace and strength which is the most charming characteristic of her sex.

A look of care shaded her sweet features, as if she had already made the acquaintance of some of the sorrows inseparable from human existence.

And yet how radiant she was! How glowing

and animated! What tenderness beamed from every glance of her great soulful eyes.

It would not have been difficult to divine from the tell-tale lights and shadows of her face that she had learned the "old, old story" which comes sooner or later to every true woman.

She was Althie, the judge's ward.

She was conscious of having had an uncommon history, yet she did not know its exact nature.

The judge had often refused to go into its details, although he had as often promised that he would eventually tell her the whole story, so far as he knew it.

He had only said that she was not a blood relation, and that she had come into his hands strangely.

She could not remember either her father or mother.

Her earliest recollections extended to a wandering band of Indians, and to a family of redskins, a childless couple, who appeared to be her captors and oppressors.

From that living grave the judge had rescued her, and ever since then she had made her home in the Green River Valley—first in a rude abode where the judge seemed to be in hiding, or to be playing hermit, and then in the handsome dwelling now at her disposal.

"Strange where the judge can be so long!" she suddenly ejaculated, in a singularly musical voice. "I wish he would come! I want to talk to him about Harry! I want to ask him ever so many questions!"

The sound of footsteps caused her to start and look out from one of the entrances of the arbor, but only to recoil as if she had seen a deadly serpent.

"That odious Berrill!" she mentally ejaculated.

Her mien expressed volumes, indicating how intensely the overseer was disliked and mistrusted.

The next instant he came into the arbor with a jaunty air and smile, inclining himself profoundly, with keenly observant eyes, his coarse cheeks doubly red with excitement and exertion.

"How bright and happy you look this afternoon!" he exclaimed, as his glances roved admiringly over her form and settled upon her face. "A flower among flowers, and the loveliest of them all!"

He seated himself on one of the rustic benches occupying two sides of the arbor, and began fanning himself with his hat.

He was thirty-five or forty years of age, lank and coarse and vulgar, with a bare face and short, wiry hair, and with manners somewhere between those of a sneak and a dude.

He was dressed expensively, although flashily, as if desirous of making a good impression, or as if keenly alive to the paucity of the advantages which had been bestowed upon him by nature.

"Were you looking for my guardian, Mr. Berrill?" asked Althie, with cold formality.

"No, I was not looking for the judge," answered the overseer, with a grim sort of doggedness behind his smiling exterior. "I am aware that he is still absent. I came here to see you!"

Althie paled a little and then flushed angrily. The presence of the intruder was most unwelcome. He had for some months been forcing his attentions upon her, although she had lost no occasion to show him how utterly obnoxious they were to her. She had even refused his hand repeatedly, and sternly forbidden him to return to the subject.

"I can hardly say that I am surprised at this intrusion," she declared, with a mien as stern as her voice. "I know you too well to be astonished at any impudence you may exhibit. You have long since forced me to recognize how little regard you have for my wishes. When my guardian returns, I shall not fail to tell him of the annoyances you have caused me in his absence!"

"He'll hardly kill me if you do," returned Berrill, defiantly. "You've often avowed to him that you do not like me, but I do not see as he has taken any particular notice of your complaints. The fact is, Althie, I am sufficiently in the confidence of Judge Clipperton to be sure of civil treatment at his hands. I know things about him that would make me a dangerous enemy, if I had reason to be one!"

The girl took two or three uneasy steps as if inclined to leave the arbor, but suppressed the inclination and seated herself as far as possible from him.

"Why are you here?" she asked, regarding him attentively, as if seeking the secret of his bold allusions to the judge.

"For the same reason that a moth hovers around a lighted candle, I suppose—simply because I can't help it," declared Berrill bitterly. "I comprehend that you do not like me, and realize that I am not the sort of man to touch the heart of a young girl like you, but I find it impossible to give you up. I still hope that you will not always look so coldly upon me. Something may happen at any moment that will cause you to regard my suit more favorably. For instance, what if the judge, who is so often

and so long absent, should fail to return from one of his mysterious expeditions?"

A thought of this nature had evidently occurred to Althie independently.

She moved uneasily in her seat.

"The suggestion is by no means a forced one," resumed Berrill. "I happen to know that the judge is often exposed to a violent death during these absences. He is liable to be taken from you at any moment—to-day or to-morrow. In such a state of affairs, would you not need the love and protection I have so long offered?"

"Never!" answered Althie, as coldly as promptly, the persistence of the unwelcome visitor proving annoying. "Let me beg of you once more, Mr. Berrill, not to delude yourself further with these suppositions. Under no circumstances whatever can I ever entertain for one moment your proposal of marriage. I must ask you again to dismiss all hopes of this nature forever."

"Sorry to be disagreeable, Althie," said the overseer, as he wiped his damp forehead, "but I must refuse to accept this decision as final. If anything should happen to the judge, who would be your protector?"

"I should still have Miss Clipperton," answered Althie, as if willing to soften her refusal by arguing this point with him.

"A fine protection, truly!" exclaimed Berrill, laughing carelessly. "A sickly, helpless, querulous old creature, who is afraid of her own shadow. You need the protection of a strong and dauntless man."

"Is not the judge a man of that sort?" asked Althie, with smiling calm. "You seem to forget that he is still living."

"He may die any day—at his age," returned the overseer, with vivid earnestness, "or he may be killed any day—he has made so many enemies, especially since he has been the manager of the *Green River Live Stock Company*!"

"Well, there is no occasion for me to worry about misfortunes of this nature until they come," declared the maiden, with provoking hope and calmness. "In fact, there will never be any occasion for you to share such afflictions as you have suggested. Let me advise you, in all friendliness, not to mourn about such possibilities until they have become actualities, or until you have been invited to weep with me."

The overseer bit his lips angrily, the flush upon his face deepening, his gaze scarcely leaving the beautiful girl's form and features.

"You don't seem to realize how greatly you are exposed to insult and peril in these solitudes," he exclaimed. "You should realize that many a wicked eye is turned in this direction."

"I only know of two, sir," returned the maiden, with a rippling laugh, that seemed as care-free as the zephyrs murmuring in the tree-tops above her. "Can you specify two others?"

"Althie! you are really provoking. This levity is most untimely and unseemly. Will you take a proper and serious view of things? You are really in danger."

The girl roused herself spiritedly.

"I do not care how many 'wicked eyes' are looking at me," she said scornfully. "I doubt if these are any more to be shunned than yours. Please to understand, Mr. Walter Berrill, that I can take care of myself. Should the sad day ever come when the contrary is the case, I will hire a keeper, but that keeper will not be you. I am not so helpless as you pretend. I am not without the most ample protection."

The overseer scanned her glowing face more narrowly, and a strange pallor suddenly began replacing the flush on his features.

"By heaven! you speak as if you had a lover at your elbow!" he ejaculated. "And perhaps you have! No fence is so high, it seems, no door so stout, no desert so solitary as to keep out a lover! As lonely as your whole life has been, and as scarce as men are in the Green River Valley, it is quite possible that you have already found a mate. Am I right?"

He glared at her jealously.

The soft light of her eyes answered him, as did the eloquent blushes suffusing her cheeks, not to speak of the sweet content curving her lips, or the conscious strength underlying her gentleness, and his pallor grew more marked, his soul more agitated, his gaze more searching.

"I see! I see!" he cried, hoarsely, springing to his feet. "You love another! This is the 'moving cause' of your coldness toward me, your scorn of my attentions, your refusal of my hand."

"You may think what you like, Mr. Berrill," returned Althie, experiencing a keen sense of satisfaction at seeing how severely her frankness was punishing him for his impudent persecutions. "Clearly enough, I am not in want of your praise or presence!"

A moment the rejected suitor stood motionless and silent, as well as irresolute, as if restrained by fear of his employer.

Then he approached her menacingly, his features pale and set, his whole frame tremulous with anger.

"Until this moment," he said, "I had never thought of coercion. But I can no longer shut my eyes to the fact that 'fair means' are inadequate. I realize now that there is a factor in

the game for which I had not provided. Who is the man?"

Althie arose with a calm dignity which added to the exasperation of the intruder.

"It will be a long time, Mr. Berrill," she replied, as coldly as scornfully, "before you become my father confessor. It is enough for all present purposes for you to know that I have no thought, sentiment, aim or hope in common with you, and that I do not propose to longer tolerate your insolent and foolish intrusions. Either I must find a new home, or you must cease to annoy and persecute me. Which shall it be?"

She faced him with an energy and resolution of which he had never before believed her capable.

"Are you in love with your guardian, with Judge Clipperton?" he suddenly demanded, the jealous wrath displayed upon his countenance becoming more intense. "A suspicion to this effect has more than once occurred to me!"

"Then you must have lost what little sense you originally possessed," declared Althie, her scorn turning to contempt. "In love with the judge! Why, he's old enough to be my grandfather! It would be the height of insanity to seriously discuss your suggestion. It is enough to say that Judge Clipperton is the very last man to whom my thoughts would turn in such a connection!"

"Are you sure?" asked Berrill, with an involuntary sigh of relief. "Then it must be that he is simply in love with you! I have noticed many little things of late which point unmistakably in that direction. As to the question of age, the judge is not so old as he looks. I happen to know—"

The maiden interrupted him with an imperative gesture.

"I have neither time nor patience to listen to these absurdities," she declared, with a glance at her watch. "I am really disgusted!"

"Very well, Althie," returned Berrill, "I accept your protest. The judge is nothing to you, whatever hopes and schemes he may have allowed himself to cherish. I am glad such is the case. If you were really in love with him, I'd give you a hint or two that would quickly turn your honey to gall. To come back to my own affairs: I realize that I have been careless. I should have been more watchful. As you have not been away from home, beyond your daily walks and rides, your lover must have been here, although I have no knowledge of any such visitor. He certainly cannot be far distant. It occurred to me yesterday, for the first time, as you rode into the pines, and was absent several hours, that gathering flowers and botanizing might not be your sole recreations. In fact, it occurred to me that you might have a rendezvous with a lover. Who and what is he? Where is he? Have I seen him? Has he been here?"

"Don't you wish you knew?" returned Althie, with an exasperating smile. "Don't you wish I would answer at least one of these questions?"

"You confess it, then?" cried Berrill, as a swift flush replaced his pallor. "How blind I've been! I see that you have been too much for the judge as well as for myself. I realize at last that there is not a moment to lose if I would ever come to a satisfactory understanding with you. Once for all, Althie, will you marry me?"

"Having asked that question so often," replied the girl, with smiling scorn, "why don't you learn to sing it to some extraordinary tune? That would make it much more amusing, both to you and to me."

"Enough!" exclaimed the overseer, his menacing look returning to his face. "I shall have to carry you off to the hills and retain you a close prisoner until you change your views concerning me!"

"That's a feat you can't accomplish, sir!" declared Althie, with the same smiling calmness she had previously exhibited.

"Oh, yes, I can!" affirmed Berrill. "The judge may not be home in a week. Miss Clipperton is of no more account than a mummy. The men on the place will as readily obey me in this respect as in all others. You are entirely at my mercy."

"What? with such a weapon as that in my hand?" demanded Althie, as she produced and cocked a revolver, bringing its muzzle to bear upon him. "You see what idle stuff you're talking. If you even speak disrespectfully to me, beyond the limits which may be cheerfully allowed to such an absurd and baseless 'wooing' as yours, you will be very quickly taught to regret it. As to any threats, Mr. Berrill, take good care not to allow yourself the slightest use of them. You'll excuse me, now," and she glanced at her watch again. "I have already wasted too much time upon you. Besides, in all frankness, I have an appointment. Try to get along without me!"

She restored her revolver to her pocket, walked quietly out of the arbor, took a few light steps to an adjacent walk, and sprang into a saddle upon a magnificent milk-white horse which had been awaiting her pleasure during the interview, although Berrill had been too preoccupied to remark its presence.

The overseer watched her a few moments, until sure of the direction she was taking, which

was precisely the same she had taken every day at the same hour during several days preceding—a direction leading to the great central solitudes of the adjacent forests.

The new light which then flashed upon his soul was as vivid as painful.

"Fool that I am!" he ejaculated, in a frenzy of jealous anger. "She has gone to meet her lover! Who is he? Where is he? Oh, I will soon find out!"

And in a few minutes more he was thundering in pursuit, availing himself of the next best horse in his employer's stables.

Evidently he meant business, too, for he had slung a Winchester rifle across his shoulder with the air of a man perfectly familiar with the weapon, and with the results which can be attained with it!

CHAPTER XI.

ADELINE AND HER CAPTORS.

How, in the mean time, had fared Adeline, the daughter of Sir Francis Pollock, at the hands of her strange hosts of the "Flying Tavern?"

What had become of her?

Her awakening, after retiring for the night at this singular death-trap, had been quite as terrible as her father's, although somewhat different.

She had become conscious of movements around her, of voices, the flashing of lights, a pounding with hammers or mallets, and all the sounds appertaining to a household removal.

Then, on opening her eyes, she realized that the diminutive apartment assigned her had been invaded, her gaze falling upon the landlord and the old woman she had noticed in the kitchen at the moment of her arrival.

They seemed to be looking for something.

"What are you doing here?" she cried, with a terror that was only too natural.

"Don't you fret, miss," enjoined the old woman, with a grim air of menace and defiance.

"I'll call my father—"

"You may call him and be blest," muttered the old man, as he continued to explore the contents of a small closet in one corner of the apartment. "You'll call him a long time, I reckon, before he'll answer."

This response added notably to the alarm Adeline had already conceived.

She made an effort to sit up in her bed, but found the bed-clothes held rigidly in place above her, and discovered as the result of a rapid investigation, that a corrugated sheet of iron had been screwed down over her as she slept, so that she was as helpless as if the lid of a coffin had been screwed down upon her.

Startled and horrified, she attempted to crawl out from under this iron canopy or blanket, but found that there was not space to do so, unless she could first remove the sheet-iron head-board of her bed, a measure she soon found to be impossible.

"What does this mean?" she demanded, as white as a sheet, her breath coming and going in quick gasps.

"It means that you are our prisoner," answered the old woman, with the same grimace she had previously displayed, "and it also means that you must remain just where you are, and as you are, until we find time to give you a little further attention. Fact is, we're moving!"

The girl echoed the concluding word, looking around and listening.

"Come, Milly," said the old man, who had evidently found what he had been looking for. "You must learn to put things away more carefully. We've lost ten minutes here, when we ought to have been in motion. While we're about it we may as well take the girl out o' here."

Seizing the bed on which Adeline lay, one at the head and the other at the foot, they bore it out into the reception-room, unheeding her cries and protests, and thence down the front steps, leaving the bedstead behind them.

Depositing the bed and its occupant upon the ground, with an injunction to Adeline to hold her tongue, the couple busied themselves a few moments with shooting bolts and unclasping hooks which seemed to hold the different parts of the inn together.

"All ready!" then called the old man. "Go!"

Three men were heard addressing as many pairs of horses, and then the inn began to move, but in three different pieces, and in as many different directions.

"Halt!" cried the old man, a moment later, and the three sections of the inn became stationary.

With what wonder Adeline looked from her coffin-like bed!

Each section of the inn rested upon a stout wagon frame, with a pole, and had four stout wheels under it, with a keyed axle forward and a linch-pin, so that it could be driven on any road or turned in any desired direction.

"You may get under way, boys," added the old man, after a critical survey of the wagons, addressing the three drivers. "Boddle will take charge. He knows where you're going and what to do. Go on, Boddle!"

The man addressed, a burly-looking ruffian

of middle age, sprung into the open door of the foremost vehicle, which appeared very much like those Gypsy wagons every reader has seen, and started at a smart pace over the prairie.

The other two drivers followed his example, and the three houses on wheels, as Adeline mentally called them, soon vanished from her view, one after another, over a slight elevation of the prairie some two hundred yards distant.

In the mean time, Adeline had made almost constant efforts to get out of her strange bed, and had uttered many a cry for release, as well as many a call addressed to her father—continuing this vain task until she had exhausted both her breath and her strength.

How vainly we need not say.

Her hosts took very little notice of her while they were dispatching the disintegrated inn, and by that time she had realized so completely the uselessness of all her calls and struggles that she had become comparatively quiet.

Her amazement, too, was well calculated to keep her quiet and silent.

The "Traveler's Rest" had vanished.

Its front steps, with their risers, had been taken apart and packed into one of the wagons, or houses on wheels, whatever we may call them.

Where the inn had stood was now a green patch of open prairie, the vigor, and color and freshness of which attested that it had not been shaded more than a few hours by the mysterious tavern.

The girl began to comprehend what she had seen and what had happened.

The "Traveler's Rest" was merely a "make-believe" tavern—a sort of trap for the unwary—which was constantly changing its location, scarcely ever remaining more than one night in the same place, especially if a lodger had made his appearance.

Being built upon wheels, and in sections, its very construction showed that it was the intention of its occupants to keep it in motion.

In this way the unfortunate guests who disappeared so mysteriously, after putting up at this strange inn, would vanish in different parts of the country, so that no hue and cry would point definitely in any one direction.

The supposed second story of the edifice was merely a thin wooden wall, with painted windows, its different parts being so arranged as to take apart readily, and so light, in their entirety, that they made only a small bundle of boards and uprights which a couple of men could easily handle.

In fact, a couple of men had taken down this imitation front in a few moments, under Adeline's eyes, and had laid its materials lengthwise in one of the wagons, or houses on wheels, which had vanished.

The maiden continued to watch the old couple a few moments longer, while they gathered various tools, timbers and boards into a pile near her, and then she remarked the approach of a covered wagon, to which had been hitched the horses she and her father had ridden.

She realized that the shed, or stable of the inn was habitually formed by raising the three sides of this wagon, and otherwise disguising its actual form and construction.

As this vehicle arrived near Adeline, she noticed that its driver was Bradd Artlow, the son of the old couple, according to what she had gathered concerning them.

"Lively, now," said the old man, impatiently. "Let's load these things into the wagon."

All busied themselves with this task, exchanging a word occasionally, but proceeding in a quiet and orderly manner, as if familiar with their labors.

"Are you all ready?" asked this youth, addressing his father and mother.

The latter answered affirmatively.

"Then why don't you get the girl into the wagon and let her out of that box?"

"All right," returned the old man. "In with her."

The two men raised the bed, the old woman assisting, and in another moment it had been stowed away within the large covered wagon, of which it occupied merely one side.

"No nonsense now, girl," cried the old woman, as she climbed into the wagon. "I'll give you your freedom, but only with the understanding that you are to be quiet and civil, as becomes a young lady of your years."

While speaking, the old woman had laid hold of some stationary wrenches which belonged to the strange covering of the bed, and which were operated beyond the girl's reach, and was unscrewing them rapidly, every turn of her hand allowing the prisoner an increase of space and movement.

"There! I can let you out now," finally said the old woman. "I've only to remove this iron jacket, and you can get up and dress yourself. There!" and she drew off the corrugated sheet of iron and stood it up in one corner of the wagon. "If you should ever have a husband, and he should have the jim-jams, deliberate trembles, or whatever you calls 'em, you've only to put him to bed under this iron blanket, and take a three-days' trip to a fashionable watering-place. When you come back, you'll find him as straight as a string."

Adeline did not feel in the least inclined to respond to this untimely jocularity.

She found that her clothing had been placed beside her in the wagon, and she lost no time in making herself presentable.

There was an arched canvas above her, which kept out the starry light of the sky, but a lantern had been hung at the front end of the wagon, and its light sufficed for all the requirements of her situation.

"There! I believe we have gathered up everything," said the old man, as he placed an ax and a hammer under the driver's seat. "We may as well be off. Bradd and I will walk, and leave you and the young lady at leisure to finish your naps, if you be still sleepy."

The old woman made no other response than to nod understandingly, and in another instant the wagon was in motion.

"Who are you?" demanded Adeline. "Whither are you taking me? What are your intentions?"

"Three questions in a single breath," returned the old woman, with a mocking air. "I'm Mrs. Ralph Artlow, a sister-in-law of the famous chief of the Jay Hawks, my husband being one of his brothers. We're taking you to a home, hospital, or prison, whatever you choose to make it. And our intentions are to make a big pile o' money out o' you before we turn you loose."

Adeline was as horrified as bewildered.

"Where is my father?" she asked.

"He's probably asleep on the prairie behind us, if no wolf, coyote, buefler, or other prowling animal has disturbed him," answered Mrs. Artlow. "At any rate, we left him there."

"He—he is not dead?" faltered Adeline, putting the finishing touches to her toilet, as well as she could under such circumstances.

"Dead? No. Why should he be dead?"

"Because he would have fought to the last to save me from falling into your hands."

The woman laughed loudly and coarsely.

"Fight!" she sneered. "Me and my husband 're not the fighting kind. We leave all that to them Jay Hawks and the 'hostiles.' We 'compleish all our work, whatsomdever it may be, by what milit'ry men call *straggedy*. That is to say, by our wits, our cleverness, or cunning. We pattern after the lovely crab, which goeth straight ahead sideways. We never fights nobody except when we're three to one and have a sure thing of it."

"Then how does it happen that I'm here at your mercy and my father elsewhere?"

"Happen?" jeered the old woman. "There's no happening about it! It's a case o' *straggedy*! The tea we served up to your father was drugged with lallum!"

The maiden comprehended and shuddered.

Her father had been unconscious of her peril!

"We gave you a dose, too," added the old woman—"so much that you oughter have slept till broad daylight, if I must say it."

"Perhaps you gave my father an overdose!" murmured Adeline. "You may have killed him!"

"Killed him! What nonsense!" returned the old woman. "Why should we kill him? Dead men, my dear, are not wuth a cent a dozen, and I've no doubt your father's wuth a hundred thousand dollars to us at this very moment! In other words, he's just as much alive as you are, and likely to remain so."

The old woman's voice attested her sincerity, and Adeline drew a long breath of relief.

It was a great consolation to have this hope of her father's safety.

"Of course we could have killed him as easy as kissing," added Mrs. Artlow. "We could have doubled the dose, or we could have given him acconite or ars'nic. The Artlows know all about p'izens and sich, and don't you forgit it! But it's the living bag o' money, and not a wuthless cawpse that we expects to turn to account."

Adeline began to comprehend the situation more clearly.

"You have some scheme, then?" she ventured.

"Scheme! Of course we have schemes. To begin with, my boy—my Bradd—that noble young hero walking beside the horses, has fallen in love with your pretty face and eyes at sight, and his whole mind is now sot on having you for his wife!"

Adeline hardly knew whether to be horrified or indignant. She was a good deal of both.

"In the second place," pursued the old woman garrulously, "my husband and I are going to obtain twenty thousand pounds from your father before we'll even tell him where you are!"

"He'll never give you a penny!" declared Adeline, sternly.

"Oh, yes—he will!" affirmed Mrs. Artlow, with an air of anticipated triumph. "We know that he's very wealthy, and that a hundred thousand dollars is no more to him than a flea-bite! That's why we didn't harm a hair of his head, miss. We've simply left him on the prairie for a day or two, so that he may scout around and worry till he's tired, and then he'll hear from us. By to-morrow Bradd or my husband will see him. He's sure not to go far until

he has heard from you. You can write him a nice little letter, telling him what a dreadful pickle you're in, and asking him to bring the ransom as soon as he can, so as to save you from being murdered!"

"I shall write nothing of the sort," declared Adeline, emphatically.

"Then we shall have to write for you. Fortunately Bradd is a scholar. He can write a hand like a copper—what is it?—like a copper-head! He composes poetry and such, bootiful! It'll be an easy thing for you to love him when you sees how smart he is and you knows him as well as I do."

The countenance of Adeline did not confirm this view of the case.

It was all she could do to refrain from entering upon a deadly struggle then and there for the recovery of her lost liberty.

But a glimpse of Bradd and his father, who were walking beside the horses, and who were readily seen through the gap between the curtains of the vehicle, was quite enough to suggest the uselessness of such a course.

"How long are we going to journey in this fashion?" she asked, striving to be calm, as she seated herself in a chair which was prominent among the other household effects in the wagon.

"Not far, of course," replied Mrs. Artilow, assuming a more affable air. "Naturally enough, we propose to remain in the neighborhood, so as to have no trouble in communicating with your father."

Adeline listened with keen interest.

The ever-living fountains of hope began to be active again in her breast.

"When shall we halt?" she asked.

"Not far from daybreak I suppose," answered Mrs. Artilow, with apparent frankness. "In other words, in a very few hours."

Partly to secure this interval for thought, and partly because she shrunk from all unnecessary conversation with the old woman, Adeline took possession of the rude bed upon which she had found herself upon the moment of awakening.

It was little more than a straw mattress covered with a blanket, but it sufficed.

"That's right," said Mrs. Artilow, looking pleased. "If you can sleep now, you'll be all the brighter in the morning."

Adeline had little expectation of sleeping, hardly comprehending how weary and exhausted she was, not to speak of the remaining effects of the drug she had taken so involuntarily.

For a few minutes, as the wagon rolled on quietly, she pondered upon what she had learned, as upon the various features of the situation, and then, before she knew it, the motion of the vehicle gave peculiar force to all the other circumstances in which she was placed, and she sunk into the profoundest of slumbers.

CHAPTER XII.

IN VERY SUSPICIOUS QUARTERS.

WHEN Adeline Pollock awoke from the slumbers to which we left her, a new day was breaking, and the covered wagon in which she had been journeying had come to a halt.

Springing up quickly, she stepped to the fore end of the wagon, parting the curtains and looking out.

The vehicle stood in a large yard, nearly twice as long as wide, around which was a high fence, with very stout boards and string-pieces and matched boards, the whole coated with paint.

The large gate by which the wagon had entered the yard had been closed and locked.

The horses had been taken out, and were being cared for upon the central floor of a barn at the rear of the yard.

The person who was rubbing them down—the only person visible at the moment—seemed to be a young and active negro whose color struck Adeline as being worthy of a Nubian.

At sight of him the girl's heart gave a sudden flutter of hope.

She was evidently in the midst of a new scene and surrounded by other persons than her ignoble captors.

She extended her glances in various directions over the top of the high fence, remarking the presence of numerous dwellings and out-buildings, with fine trees singly and in groups scattered profusely among them.

In fact, she readily perceived that she was in the midst of a considerable village, which was laid out in regular squares, with wide streets and avenues, and with two or three fine public squares, including one of at least a hundred acres which occupied a slope descending gracefully from a distant range of hills.

A new fund of hope took possession of Adeline's heart, as the result of this survey.

She was in the midst of fellow-beings!

How changed the scene around her from that she had last looked upon!

Surely there was still hope for her.

How quiet and calm the town lay spread out before her.

There was no one stirring at that moment, as was to be expected, considering how early it still was.

Not even a spiral of smoke was anywhere visible above these neat and tasteful dwellings.

About two blocks away was a somewhat large building, with a square tower and cupola, which might be either a school or a court-house, but in any case a view of it could not have failed to produce many a pleasant and hopeful suggestion in the mind of the captive.

At one end of the yard in which the maiden found herself—the end opposite that occupied by the barn in which were the horses—was a square wide dwelling, with verandas, a flat roof, and a large hall traversing the house from front to rear, as Adeline could readily see, the wagon being in a line with it.

There was a modest sign upon the edge of the roof, with this legend, in gilt letters:

"Rocky Mountain Sanitarium. Mr and Mrs. Dr. Ebenzer Jones, proprietors. Board by the day or week. Treatment of all diseases. Horses and carriages."

The interest of our heroine deepened.

Where were the Artilows?

Under what circumstances had they left her at this mysterious Sanitarium?

Did they expect to return to her before her slumbers were ended?

Puzzled and curious, she descended promptly from the wagon, and took her way toward the rear entrance of the house, after remarking that the man caring for the horses merely sent a glance after her, without betraying any especial interest in her movements.

A keen hope of escape suddenly took possession of her soul.

No one seemed to be watching her, or even giving her a thought.

Among all the people of the village, she must surely find friends in the course of the morning, and the assistance she needed.

Seeing nothing of her captors, her hopes suddenly acquired new force.

As she reached the steps of the rear veranda, on which were a couple of chairs and a rustic *tête-à-tête*, a dowager-like woman advanced from the wide hall to meet her, bowing and smiling a welcome, but affecting to be astonished at her presence.

This woman wore an old-fashioned silk gown, and had a rich lace shawl drawn carelessly around her shoulders.

Her hair was puffed and powdered, in the style of a hundred years ago, and drawn up over a high comb, with gilt spear-heads defining its borders.

Her feet were incased in high-heeled slippers, and in her ears was a pair of massive gold drops, while her fingers fairly glittered with rings.

"I presume you are Mrs. Dr. Jones?" queried Adeline, returning the polite bow of the dowager-like lady.

"I am, miss. And you—where can you have come from? I see the gate is locked. How came you in the back yard?"

"I came in yonder wagon."

"Indeed!" and the hostess struck an attitude of surprise. "How strange! I didn't think of any one's being in the wagon. Who are the people who came here with you?"

"Don't you know, madam?"

"No, miss. We only know that they were an old couple and a young man—the latter appearing to be the son of the former. They said they wanted to leave their wagon in our yard a day or two, and then they walked quietly out of town, in the direction of the large park you see on the hillside yonder!"

Adeline was astonished.

She could only suppose that the Artilows had conceived some sudden apprehension or received some hint of pursuit.

"Who were they?" added the hostess, seating herself in one of the chairs on the veranda and inviting the maiden by a gesture to take possession of the other.

"Oh, madam," returned Adeline, resolving to cast herself upon the mercy of her new acquaintance, "they are the worst couple in the world! Their name is Artilow. You've heard of the 'Flying Tavern,' a house upon wheels, which moves every day to a new location, and traps all the unwary travelers it can?"

"Yes, I've heard of it. But what do you know about it?"

"I have been caught in it—my father and I! It's a man-trap—a den of murderers! Every man who puts up there is drugged and robbed, and then thrust out upon the prairie, to be eaten by the wolves, while the 'Flying Tavern' moves on to a new location!"

A strange expression flitted over the averted countenance of Mrs. Dr. Jones, as she produced a large fan and began fanning herself vigorously.

"Who is your father?" she asked.

"He is Sir Francis Pollock, baronet, a member of the House of Commons—"

"Ah! from London?" and Mrs. Dr. Jones displayed an interest as keen as sudden. "Pollock, too? Any relation of Major Pollock, the manager of the *Great Western Land and Cattle Company*?"

"Yes, madam. The major is my brother!"

"Indeed!" and a look of gratified avarice and greed lighted up the face of the hostess, which was still averted.

"It has been a long time since we had a letter from my brother," added the girl, "and we finally became so anxious about him that we have come over here to look him up. You seem to have heard of him. Do you know where he is?"

"We only know that there is such a man—or rather *was* such a man. I've heard that he was killed several months ago in a raid of the redskins."

"Oh! no—no!" protested Adeline tearfully.

"I merely mention what I've heard, my child," said Mrs. Dr. Jones, with pretended sympathy. "It's certain that the *company* is broken up, and no one knows where your brother is."

For a few moments Adeline was silent, struggling with her painful emotions.

"What place is this, Mrs. Jones?" she then asked.

"It is called Rosedale."

"What is the population?"

"Not far from three hundred, when everybody is at home, but we have a large floating population, and at this season of the year not more than half of the houses are occupied."

"How singular!" Adeline could not help saying. "Have you any authorities in the place—any judges, sheriffs, or other officials?"

"Oh, there's a judge living here, same as there are majors, colonels, and all sorts of people with titles, military and civil, but they mind their own business, and do not meddle with the affairs of their neighbors. There's a sort of constable here, if you wanted to look up the Artilows. What was your idea?"

"First of all I want to claim the protection of some one who is in a position to befriend and assist me," declared Adeline.

"Well, I can protect you," returned Mrs. Dr. Jones, assuming her most pleasant voice and mien. "I am quite at your disposal!"

"Oh, madam! will you protect me?" cried our heroine earnestly. "I have been captured and brought here by that terrible family of whom I have spoken. Their idea is to extort a ransom from my father for me."

"It would seem that they have given up that idea," returned Mrs. Jones. "At any rate they have gone away and left you here, without saying a word to me about you. Does not that seem to show that they have changed their minds? Be that as it may, Miss Pollock, you have nothing more to fear from them. You are perfectly free to come and go at your own good pleasure, and I shall be glad to render you any assistance in my power."

"Oh, thanks! thanks! I am so glad," cried Adeline, as she sprang up with joyous relief and gratitude, and seized the hand of her hostess, pressing it to her lips. "I shall always be grateful, as will my father for any kindness you can show me. May I stay here a day or two, or until I can communicate with my father?"

"Certainly," answered Mrs. Jones, promptly. "Remain here as long as you like."

Adeline expressed her thanks warmly.

To be candid, she did not quite put her confidence unreservedly in her hostess.

It seemed to her that Mrs. Dr. Jones had many of the peculiarities of Mrs. Ralph Artilow, and the suspicion had even occurred to her that her late hostess of the "Flying Tavern" and her present hostess of the "Rocky Mountain Sanitarium" might easily be one and the same person.

She was not without positive facts which pointed in this direction.

For instance, Mrs. Jones had pronounced the word military in precisely the same manner as Mrs. Artilow had pronounced it, namely, as "*militry*."

It might be, however, she reasoned, that this was the usual and general pronunciation of this word in Rosedale and elsewhere in the neighborhood.

It was odd, to be sure, she further reasoned, that the Artilows should have abandoned her so unceremoniously, but that fact might have been caused by some sudden danger, some sudden pursuit, or some discovery or project which would be cleared up sooner or later.

How Adeline regretted that she had not once obtained a good view of Mrs. Artilow's face during the time she had been with her in the "Flying Tavern" and in the covered wagon!

As the case actually stood, the maiden could do no less than suppress her suspicions, master her uneasiness, and avail herself of the help of her new acquaintance as much as she could.

"How would it do," suggested Mrs. Jones, "to send the constable of whom I have spoken to look for your father?"

"That's an excellent idea," returned Adeline, with mingled delight and relief. "I believe he would be able to track the wagon to the spot where it came from—that is to say, to the prairie where my father was left asleep on the ground, if I may credit what Mrs. Artilow told me!"

"Then let us lose no time, my dear child, in sending Mr. Appleton—that's the name of our constable—to look for your father," proposed Mrs. Jones, with an air of kindness, thoughtfulness, and frankness. "Doubtless your father

will be found in the course of the day and be brought to you here!"

"Oh, if it might be!" sighed Adeline.

She stifled all her uneasiness and inquietude, and resolved to at once carry out this suggestion.

"If you like, Miss Pollock," resumed Mrs. Jones, "I will send my husband to look up Mr. Appleton and dispatch him on this errand."

"The sooner the better, madam," returned Adeline, earnestly, she having already conceived a great interest in the proposed measure. "It's as plain as day that my first duty is to find my father, and thus assure myself of his safety, advice, and assistance."

"My husband will attend to the matter as soon as he is up and dressed," assured Mrs. Jones. "In the mean time, you will please consider yourself as much at home here as if you were in your own house in London. Shall I not show you to your room immediately?" she added, arising. "I can place at your disposal any articles you may desire in the way of clothes, and I'm sure you will feel much better to wash off the prairie dust and renew your cuffs and collars."

"Many thanks," returned Adeline, who had also arisen. "You may be sure, Mrs. Jones, that I am very, very grateful for your kindness!"

She followed her hostess into the wide hall and up a broad staircase to a neatly-furnished room upon the second floor, the doors and windows of which were standing wide open, and through which a gentle, refreshing breeze was circulating.

"This room belonged to my only daughter, a dear, good girl, of about your own age, Miss Pollock, whom I had the misfortune to lose by consumption nearly a year ago," observed Mrs. Jones, as she waved her hand around. "Everything remains precisely as my poor, lost darling left it!"

There was a close, musty odor in the room, despite the balmy air now circulating through it, and it occurred to Adeline that the doors and windows could not have been long opened.

Proceeding to a closet, Mrs. Jones laid out upon the snowy counterpane various articles of a young lady's wardrobe, inviting Adeline to help herself to any of them that might strike her fancy or respond to her requirements.

"And now to be cheerful and hopeful," she then said, as she drew the girl to her heart and pressed a kiss upon her forehead. "Believe me, you are among friends. We'll soon find your father, and get you out of all this worry and trouble. Breakfast will be ready by the time you are ready for it."

And with this she withdrew, with a smile of encouragement, leaving the maiden at length to herself.

"How strange it all is," mused Adeline, looking after her hostess. "I seem to be dreaming!"

How little did she foresee the awakening that was so soon to come!

CHAPTER XIII. THE HIDDEN CAMP.

IN the depths of one of those majestic primeval forests which are nowhere better represented than on the great plateaus of the Rocky Mountains, could have been seen a charming rustic camp, where ruggedness and wildness seemed to vie with the gentler characteristics of silvan beauty.

The spot would have figured equally well as a retreat, hiding-place, or sanitarium, and a hunter, hermit, invalid, or fugitive from justice would have been equally appreciative of its quiet, retirement, salubrity, convenience and safety.

In the background, or at the north side of the central open space, was a model hut, some eight feet by ten, put together by cords and wire instead of nails, and built of sticks and poles in their natural state, without a single sawed or squared piece of timber.

In this hut, across one end, was a small camp bedstead, upon which was a soft mattress, with the whitest of linen, and a counterpane of rare design and finish.

At one side of the solitary apartment was a small rustic table well supplied with books and papers—the latter of somewhat ancient date—and with various simple little mementoes of a residence in such a solitude.

The flooring was composed of straight poles laid close together and covered by mats woven from long and supple shoots of mountain willow.

A Winchester rifle hung prominently over the table, within reach of the head of the bed, and it was kept in countenance by a brace of handsomely-mounted revolvers.

There was a considerable variety of kitchen utensils in a large box which had been turned upon its edge at one side of the entrance of the hut, and just within the door was a cupboard containing an ample supply of tinware and dishes, including cups, and saucers and plates.

In front of the hut was a rustic fireplace of stones, with two crotched sticks supporting a crossbeam, from which pended a chain and a sufficiency of hooks to enable the cook to hang

his pots and kettles at any desired distance from the fire.

The open central space to which we have alluded was about a hundred yards in diameter, so that the sun shone upon the hut a large share of the day.

This space, which was rather square than round, was inclosed on all sides by tall trees, principally pines, which sheltered it completely from all winds.

On the north side of the camp, and hedging it in from that quarter, was a clear mountain lake, overlooked by a tall, pinnacled bluff, and on the west side was a considerable stream flowing from the lake over a rocky and uneven bed, with a constant murmur, which was inexpressibly inspiring and soothing.

The other two sides of the camp were naturally more open to intrusion, but here art had remedied the insufficiency of nature.

Vines had been transplanted, thorn bushes accumulated, and evergreens set out in such close contact as to seriously obstruct where they did not absolutely bar any ordinary sort of passage.

In a word, the camp had been literally hedged in on these two sides by an elaborate artificial arrangement of trees, shrubs, fallen trunks, vines and creepers, so as to present an almost insurmountable barrier save at one point, the entrance.

Even this entrance had been carefully disguised, it being a narrow and winding passage between hedges of mingling trees and vines, and having two or three barriers, one of which was a fallen pine, which would have turned aside even a bear or a buffalo, so small and hidden was the opening giving admittance.

In front of the fireplace, which contained a bed of living coals, from which scarcely smoke enough ascended to become visible, was seated, in a rustic rocking-chair, as fine a specimen of manly beauty as nature at her best is in the habit of showing.

He was the missing Harry Pollock, the only son and heir of Sir Francis, whose strange and inexplicable silence had caused the baronet and his daughter to journey from England to the Green River Valley, with the results already narrated.

Harry's forehead was high and intellectual, his glance penetrating and comprehensive, his mouth exquisitely curved under his long and silky mustache, and his frame a model of combined strength and activity.

He had signalized himself in all the sports and recreations of youth, and had stood among the first in all his classes at school and college.

As to his career in the Green River Valley, it had been one long holiday, despite his occasionally arduous duties, and the perils and fatigues he had often been called upon to encounter.

With Daredeath Dick as his constant companion and assistant, he had made himself feared and respected throughout a large strip of "Uncle Sam's pasture" during the two years he had been the manager of the *Great Western Land and Cattle Company*.

Not far from Harry, on the opposite side of the fire, sat one of the survivors of the conflict which had been so nearly fatal to its principal heroes—a tall, raw-boned cowboy, scarcely eighteen years of age, and yet weighing a hundred and eighty pounds.

This priceless companion and friend bore the unromantic name of Jerry Winkle.

Notwithstanding his rough and formidable aspect, Jerry's heart was as tender as a woman's.

He was also one of the most honest and faithful men that ever existed.

The business which occupied Harry at the moment was nothing more serious than the broiling of a delicious steak.

With the morsel of beef duly secured upon the tines of a wooden fork, which had a handle little less than six feet in length, he was in a position to render the most critical justice to the task he had undertaken.

"There! it's done to a turn," he ejaculated, as he transferred the steak to a warm plate which had already been sprinkled with pepper and salt and moistened with melted butter.

"Will you join me, Jerry?"

"Not if you will excuse me, Mr. Pollock," replied Jerry. "I have been warring on our supply of beef ever since daylight, and have eaten enough to provoke serious discussion among neighboring herds if my conduct should be discovered."

"Which proves that you have an excellent appetite, and that you have had plenty of leisure," commented Harry, as he commenced a flank attack upon the savory morsel before him. "I've paid no little attention myself to-day to the culinary department. My appetite is simply raging."

"No wonder, sir, after your long struggle with death," returned Winkle, who was as distinguished for his elegant language as is the "cowboy pianist" for his music. "I am delighted to see what progress you are making toward a complete restoration of your wonted strength and activity. Evidently our days in this sunny retreat are now drawing to a close, sir!"

"Yes, Jerry," and a pensive shade passed over Harry's face. "We shall leave here to-night or in the morning, to return to the scene from which we have so long been absent. Go where we may, however, I shall never forget this spot, Jerry, no more than I can forget the faithful devotion with which you have honored me!"

"I have tried to do for you what I could, sir," said the cowboy, with the simple modesty of a real hero, "and little enough it has been!"

"You have been to me like the best of brothers," affirmed Harry Pollock, with an emphasis which brought tears of pleasure to the eyes of Winkle. "If I were to live a thousand years, Jerry, and see a new world every day, I could never forget the months we have passed in this retreat, your constant care and kindness, your thoughtfulness, your gentle ministrations, your tireless and heroic faithfulness of every day and hour!"

"Oh, it's not for me to take the credit of your cure, Mr. Pollock," returned Winkle, as earnestly as quickly. "Let us praise the good angel by whom this miracle has really been wrought!"

"Ah, Jerry! there is a subject we shall never differ about," cried Harry, as a look of ineffable tenderness and gratefulness mantled his face. "Has she not been glorious? Has she not thrown new radiance upon the name of woman?"

"She has indeed, sir!" affirmed Jerry. "And that she may long live to gladden the life she saved, is my most heartfelt prayer!"

The suggestion did not fall upon unfruitful soil, as was shown by the long and earnest reflection by which it was succeeded. The silence was not broken again until Harry had finished his repast and glanced at the sun.

"It is about time to expect our daily visit," he then said. "I will go as far as the brook to meet Miss Clipperton!"

Slipping a revolver into his belt, he sauntered across the clearing in the direction of the somewhat difficult entrance to it of which we have spoken.

"I hope you will devote one eye wholly to the enemy, sir," suggested Winkle. "It's more than likely that Miss Clipperton has been followed to this vicinity by the judge, by some too active admirer, or by some reprobate who has been inspired with a vivid curiosity by her long and frequent rides."

"Thanks for the hint, Jerry, which I shall bear in mind," returned Harry. "I am only too keenly alive to the actual and possible drawbacks of the situation, and I hope to find, during the next hour, a partial remedy for them."

Nodding a temporary adieu in his usual pleasant manner, Harry passed out of the camp, taking his way toward the spot where he was in the habit of waiting for his fair visitress—a velvety bank of the brook, where a fallen giant of the forest offered him a convenient seat.

He had not been long at this spot when the clatter of a horse's hoofs was heard at no great distance.

"There she is!" he ejaculated.

What relief there was in his tones! and how his face brightened!

He arose and stood impatiently near the brook until Althie had come into view, on the back of her spirited milk-white steed, and then he waved her a warm salute with his hand.

In a few moments she drew rein beside him, accepting the hand he so eagerly offered.

"Let me help you down," he said.

"Oh, do not bother with me," she returned, almost gayly. "I am almost afraid to tax your strength. Nevertheless, if you insist upon it—"

She sprang down lightly, the use she made of him being little more than a simulation.

"I am used to seeing you so weak and helpless, you know," she added, by way of excuse. "But I can see an improvement in you since yesterday, as I have seen on the occasions of my other visits. At this rate you will soon be ready to resume the burden of life!"

"Yes," and Harry sighed as he drew the bridle over his arm and led the way toward the camp. "I consider myself fully convalescent and beyond all danger of a relapse, if I am reasonably careful. We propose to leave here in the morning."

"So soon?" murmured Althie.

"In the mean time let us sit down once more in our dear old hut, Althie. Our little idyl of pain and suffering and womanly devotion is over, never to return. I have suffered long and intensely here, since that awful afternoon when you found me so near death, but the one great joy of my life has come to me here, the one great hope, the one great awakening. It is here that I first knew you, Althie, and the bright memories I carry away from this spot can never fade away from my soul—never!"

He could feel her arm tremble in his own as he ceased speaking, and he did not need to look very close to see that her mood was one of tearful gladness.

Hitching the noble horse to a sapling near the entrance to the clearing, he conducted Althie to the hut, seating her in a large rustic chair

with the manufacture of which he had beguiled many a weary and pain-laden hour.

"It is so good of you to come," he said, as he seated himself beside her. "I hardly slept last night, I was so sorry I had let you go without unburdening my soul to you. Althie, is the life you have saved worth having? Is there aught in me that you can appreciate? Are you willing that I should devote to your happiness all the long days which are to come? Will it be some return for all you have done for me if I should employ the remainder of my life in trying to do something for you? Is it strange, Althie, that I have learned to love you? that my soul thought is of you? that I shall never know another moment of real rest and peace except by your side? Althie, dear Althie," and he took her hand, "you know the simple story of my life, as I know yours, all my hope and wishes, all my merits and shortcomings. Will you crown all your goodness to me by becoming my wife?"

"If you want me, Harry," and she nestled upon his breast while his arm stole around her. "My heart has long been yours—almost from the moment when I saw you coming back to life under my hands. If you want me, darling Harry, I will be to you as true and loving a wife as mortal ever had. To have each other, dearest, will not always keep the great clouds out of our skies, but there will always be a bright side to even the worst of them if we face them together, hand in hand, and heart to heart."

"It is settled then!" cried Harry, joyfully. "You shall be my own little wife, dearest, and I will be your loving and devoted husband. Let this kiss be the seal of my promise, even as it is the consecration of my hopes."

Very pleasant was the scene they presented, as Althie reclined on his breast, with her arms around his neck, returning his caresses; but it suddenly received a very singular foreground—that presented by Winkle, as he strode rapidly across the clearing, rifle in hand, taking his way in the direction from which the maiden had come.

"Mr. Winkle seems excited," murmured Althie, looking after the cowboy.

"I may have failed to secure your horse properly," returned Harry. "In any case Jerry will attend to any matter which claims attention. Of course I must speak to the judge about our intentions, and I shall take care to see him early in the morning."

"The remark reminds me of something I wanted to say, Harry," said Althie, a little nervously. "You have heard me speak of Berrill. He has not only been bothering me again to-day with his proposal of marriage, but he begins to threaten me—perhaps because he begins to see that I love another."

"What sort of a man is he? Describe him." Althie did so, adding:

"I am afraid he will try to carry me off to the hills, with the aid of some of the men under him, in the course of the coming night, as he will naturally take an occasion for this business when the judge is absent. Are you fully resolved to leave here immediately, dear Harry?"

"Yes, darling. I am quite strong again, and all those terrible wounds are so well healed that I do not fear any further trouble from them. As many bright sides as there are to my stay here," and he kissed her again, tenderly, "I begin to tire of it. Besides, I am anxious to write to my relatives in England with my own hand, and post my letter in such a way that they will be sure to get it. It was six weeks after the battle, you know, before I was able to dictate a letter to you, and if that missive should have failed to reach its destination, just think what the anxiety of my father and sister must be. In a word, the time has come," and his brow darkened a little, "to call Rink Artlow and his Jay Hawks to account."

"Oh, Harry!" cried Althie, clinging to him tearfully. "Is that terrible fight to be resumed or repeated?"

"No, darling. In case of need, I shall apply to the governor for troops. I suppose our ranch has been burned, and all our horses and cattle run off. I begin to fret with all these issues and interests, darling, and must get back to my post."

"Well, since you are decided to leave this place," suggested Althie, "why not come to the Pines this evening, with Winkle, and pass the night there, so as to be at hand in case Berrill should enter upon the execution of his menace?"

"I will come with pleasure, dearest."

"You have horses, I believe?"

"Yes, Althie, a nice pair of my old favorites, which have been recovered from the enemy. I have taken several short rides lately, and have experienced no difficulty whatever. I expect another of my cowboys, with extra horses, in the course of the afternoon, so that you may depend upon seeing me at the Pines early in the evening."

Althie drew a sigh of relief, expressing her thanks in caresses.

"But ought I not to come secretly?" suggested Harry, after a pause. "To come openly may be to provoke a struggle, to betray ourselves too much to the enemy, to cause Berrill to collect a

number of followers for the proposed measure, and all that? I think it would be better if I were to come secretly, with Winkle and Hardee, and take possession of the house, as it were, without letting even Miss Clipperton know of our presence."

"You are right, darling. Here's an extra key of the cellar, which Berrill and Miss Clipperton never have occasion to enter, and there are so many bushes near the house that you can readily give yourself admittance to the cellar without being seen. I will step down to you as soon as you arrive, and will show you to a spare room you and your men can occupy later."

The matter was soon settled upon this basis.

"The conduct of that man has made me a little nervous, I think," at length observed Althie, "and I am going back soon, so as to reach home before dark. He made an effort to follow me here to-day, but I have never omitted to take a few precautions against that sort of thing, and I have no doubt that he has had his labor for his pains."

"If you are at all anxious about him, Althie, Winkle and I will accompany you home," said Harry promptly.

"No, darling. I should like your company, but there are other things to consider. As I have never spoken to Miss Clipperton about you, and especially as she is old and querulous, it's a task of some magnitude and delicacy to prepare the way for your arrival. But I shall be waiting for you, whenever you may come."

We need not pause upon the further exchange of ideas and intentions of the young couple.

A whole hour glided away, seeming like a few moments, and then, with a thousand tender adieus from Harry, who accompanied her as far as the brook, Althie took her departure, waving an affectionate farewell until she had passed from his view.

"She has been followed hither, Mr. Pollock," said Jerry Winkle, appearing to his employer abruptly, rifle in hand.

"How do you know that, Jerry?" asked Harry, with a startled air.

"I saw the fellow."

"Ah! that was why you crossed the clearing so suddenly?"

"That was one reason, sir. A better reason was that he had poked a rifle through the bushes and was endeavoring to get a bead upon you without endangering the young lady."

"The scoundrel! Where is he now?"

"Hidden somewhere in the bushes at the head of the lake—quite in the opposite direction from that Miss Clipperton has taken, or I should not have let her depart without mentioning the man's presence to you. As it was, I thought it would be better not to alarm her."

"Quite right, Jerry," commented Harry. "The villain's bullet is not intended for her, but for me. What is he like?"

Winkle gave a full description of the intruder, having obtained a perfect glimpse of him.

"Ah! he's Berrill!" exclaimed Harry. "Miss Clipperton has given me all the particulars about him. He's an overseer on the judge's ranch."

"Whatever he may be, sir, this is not the first time I have seen him. He was with Artlow and Rube Middleton on the day of the fight. He's the chap who wounded me and killed poor Silvertown."

"Are you sure, Jerry?" demanded Harry, with the keenest interest and excitement.

"Perfectly sure, sir," assured Winkle. "He was one of Artlow's right-hand men throughout all that fight."

Harry looked puzzled—astounded.

"But what can an overseer on the judge's ranch have to do with the Jay Hawks?" he asked.

"That's a point for us to elucidate as soon as possible, Mr. Pollock," declared Winkle. "I will merely say now that it is not the first point of contact I have remarked between that ranch and the band of Artlow. The judge, you must remember, is the manager of that rival cattle concern which has absorbed so much of our lost stock!"

"True, Jerry. The judge as well as his overseer must receive our attention. It's rather fortunate that I have arranged with Miss Clipperton to pass the night at the Pines, and you will go with me. The purpose of this arrangement was to guard Miss Clipperton from the disagreeable attentions of this Berrill. If Hardee arrives in time with the extra horses he shall bear us company. In the mean time, we may as well beat up the woods around us and dislodge this intruder. I don't like to feel that his Winchester may possibly be leveled at me this very moment!"

"Leave him to me, sir," proposed Winkle, while you pack up the little souvenirs you propose to take away with you. I shall not be long in dislodging him, if he is still lurking near us."

A ball whistled between Winkle and his employer and a sharp report succeeded.

"Ah, there he is now," cried the cowboy, as he bounded in the direction from which the ball came, keeping his eye upon the fleeing assassin, who was indeed Berrill.

Of course Jerry was heavily handicapped for

the task he had undertaken, since he had to watch Berrill and pick out his own route, while the overseer's whole attention was given to reaching the spot where he had left his horse and making good his escape—a task, we may add, he succeeded in accomplishing, although a ball from Jerry's Winchester must have passed uncomfortably near him as he vanished.

"Well, we'll see him later," commented Harry, as a stern look settled upon his face. "Beat up the bushes, Jerry, to be sure that he has left none of his breed behind him, and I'll proceed to make ready for our departure. Fortunately he can make Miss Clipperton no trouble. She can easily outstride him, and will take good care to keep him at a distance."

Nevertheless, the incident had made Harry nervous about Althie's safety, and it was with a well-defined anxiety that he set about his preparations to follow her to Judge Clipperton's, whither we will now precede him.

CHAPTER XIV.

"JUDGE CLIPPERTON!"

THE hiding-place of Buffalo Bill and Nate Salsbury under the bushes covering the "Treasure Chest," in the wagon of the robber-chief, was not the most comfortable spot in the world, but they remained firm in their resolve to accompany him to his destination.

They had already heard and seen quite enough to assure them that this journey would not end without bringing them important information.

They were curious, too, to see what would be the consternation of the robber-chief on opening the supposed Treasure Chest, to find only the body of his lieutenant—of Rube Middleton, the man he had so treacherously murdered.

"I begin to see a thing or two," at length whispered Buffalo Bill in Nate's ear. "I think I could tell you now what will be this man's destination. All these Artlow brothers have masqueraded in many different characters. The one I brought to justice, years ago, was figuring as a female cook in a hotel when I finally run him down. The worst of the survivors, that Ralph Artlow, the 'Flying Tavern' man, has as many hues as a chameleon, and how many different rôles this chief of the Jay Hawks is just now carrying on remains to be seen. The whole tribe certainly has this in common with the fleas—the more you undertake to put your fingers on them the more they're not there!"

"A dangerous lot, sure enough!" returned Nate. "I shall be better pleased with the situation when we get one or two more of these brothers run under!"

After a long and rapid drive, the robber chief reached a considerable brook, with a level, sandy bottom, into which he turned, ascending it in a westerly direction nearly a mile.

Then he drew out upon the left bank and came to a halt, as watchful of ear and eye as a wolf.

The silence which had so long reigned around him was still unbroken, and the fact gave him great joy.

He was clear alike of the Wild West and his own followers.

No one had watched or followed him.

He was safe!

"Yes, I have dropped out of that field," he muttered, with increased jubilation. "I've done with the old life forever. I shall never stir a step to see even my brother Ralph again. The rest of my days shall be one long delight. Now for Althie and love!"

Buffalo Bill and Nate again exchanged comments.

They were becoming more curious about the chief of the Jay Hawks every moment.

"I know where we are now, whither we are bound, and what our destination is," concluded Buffalo Bill, after stealing a glance from his concealment. "If we don't prove to be more than the fellow has bargained for, I shall be greatly mistaken."

Resuming progress, the robber chief at length came to a natural clearing of such vast extent that it was in itself a plain.

In the midst of this plain, surrounded by detached groves and splendid grounds, stood a charming residence—in a word, one with which the reader is already familiar, namely, the abode of Judge Clipperton, as of his ward, Althie.

Drawing rein, while still in the forest, Artlow sprung to the ground, again spending a few moments in watching and listening.

Then, hearing and seeing nothing suspicious, he took his way into the midst of a dense group of pines near which he had halted.

Advancing to one of the principal trees of the group, he uncovered with his hands a box which had been buried under mold and leaves at its foot.

This box was a foot long and nearly as wide, and from it ascended a wire, passing up into the top of the pine, and appearing to a casual observer like one of those creeping vines or parasites which are to be found in every forest.

A single glance within the box would have detected its secret.

It was the terminus of a telephone.

Placing the mouth-piece to his lips, Artilow gave utterance to a loud call:

"Hal-loh-oh!"

The response came so quickly that it almost seemed like an echo.

"Is it you, Berrill?" pursued the robber-chief.

"Yes, sir," came the answer.

"Is everything all right, Berrill?"

"Never more so!"

"There has been no trouble in my absence? no intrusion? no discovery?"

"None, sir!"

"In proof of which, give me the number!"

"Forty-eight hundred and ninety-six!"

"Correct. That's all, Berrill."

"That's all, sir. You don't need any assistance? You don't want me to come to you?"

"No. It will suffice if I see you at a reasonable hour of the morning. Good-night."

Leaving the box at the foot of the tree as he had found it, Artilow returned to the wagon, and once more resumed progress.

"You hear? you see?" commented Buffalo Bill. "It turns out as I supposed it would! The 'other name' of Artilow is Judge Clipperton!"

Such was indeed the case.

"But why the telephone?" asked Nate.

"Don't you see why? He has been away a week or a fortnight, at the head of the Jay Hawks, and what may not happen in a week or a fortnight? It would be quite possible for the authorities, if they knew what we know, or had tracked any of his rascalities home to him, to take possession of his retreat here in his absence, and place a few men on the watch for him. Not to be caught in this way, not to walk into a trap of this nature, he takes good care to assure himself that all is right hereabouts before he puts in an appearance. Rather a novel arrangement, isn't it?"

"It is, indeed! What a pity it is that we couldn't hear the responses of the party at the other end of the wire."

"Oh, I comprehend them just as well as if I had heard them," assured Buffalo Bill; "partly from what was said by Artilow himself, and partly from the fact that he is pushing on toward the house. He finds that all is safe, you see. The name of the party at the house is Berrill—a point we must remember. Of course I took notice of the spot where this end of the wire terminates. If necessary, I could find it. The wire, of course, runs in the tree-tops, with all sorts of turns, and variations and concealments, so that it would be no easy matter to detect its existence, or to trace it."

At the end of a few minutes more the wagon drew up at the corner of the stable of Judge Clipperton, and the driver again looked around and listened.

So far as he could see, everything was favorable to his wishes.

Leaping lightly to the ground, he hitched his horses to a post which had been planted conveniently near for use on such occasions, and once more inclined an attentive ear to his surroundings.

"Nervous, eh?" whispered Nate.

"No, only watchful," replied Buffalo Bill.

"He's about to get off with the old man and get on with the new!"

The silence still remaining unbroken, the robber-chief produced a key from his pocket and unlocked the door of a small room, similar to the "office" in an average livery, which occupied one corner of the stable of Judge Clipperton, and in another moment he had entered, and closed and locked the door behind him.

Producing a light, he unlocked the door of a closet at one side of the room and brought out a suit of clothing and a hat, which he proceeded to exchange for those he had been wearing.

Next he put on a wig of formidable size and length, which was almost white, and which very well became the character he was in the act of assuming.

Then he fastened on a beard which corresponded with the wig, it being of the same color, and descending nearly to his waist.

And finally he modified with a powder the dark color of the small portion of his cheeks and forehead which remained visible, and took a look at his reflection in a mirror.

"It'll do!" he muttered.

Extinguishing his light, he left the room, briskly, locking the door.

Another swift glance around assured him that all remained quiet, and he took his way promptly toward the wagon in which he had come, proceeding to untie his horses from the post mentioned.

For a moment Nate was startled, as he peered out from his concealment, not being able to recognize the new-comer.

"Oh, it's Artilow," assured Buffalo Bill. "He has simply transformed himself into the judge. The robber-chief has disappeared, you see and only Judge Clipperton remains. A neat metamorphosis, is it not?"

"Decidedly! What next?"

"His next measure will doubtless be to get rid of the 'Treasure Chest,' and he will, of course, take it to the house."

This theory proved quite correct.

In a few moments more the wagon was drawn up, as silently as possible, at the side entrance of the dwelling, and the judge—as we must now call him—again leaped to the ground.

And here he again listened.

All continued quiet, both within and without the dwelling.

Tying his horses to another convenient post, the judge took his way to the hind end of the wagon, and proceeded to throw out a portion of the bushes by which the "Treasure Chest" had been so neatly covered.

Of course Nate Salsbury and Buffalo Bill were no longer in the wagon.

They had found ample time, while the judge was listening and tying his horses, to slip from their concealment and vanish behind a row of evergreen shrubs which stood within three feet of the house.

The next measure of the judge was to unlock and open a wide door which led into the cellar.

The watchers comprehended.

The trunk was to be placed in the cellar.

"It's heavy," thought the judge, as he returned to the hind end of the wagon and looked at the trunk. "I ought to have a plank to ease it to the ground. I ought to have assistance! But I'll not bother with either. With such a prize as this, I cannot be too guarded, too secret. I cannot take too few into my confidence. I don't want even Berrill to know what I am doing."

Climbing into the wagon, he took hold of the trunk and placed it upon the edge of the wagon-box, although not without the greatest exertion. Then he lowered it carefully to the ground, and worked it cantingly over the distance between the wagon and the cellar-steps, finally sliding it down the declivity and depositing it in the center of the cellar.

"There! the thing's done!" he ejaculated, wiping the perspiration from his forehead. "I'll look at its contents later."

He did not remark that Buffalo Bill and Nate Salsbury had preceded the "Treasure Chest" into the cellar, but such was the case.

While he was getting the trunk out of the wagon—his whole attention absorbed in the task—the two daring plainsmen had easily reached the cellar-way, down which they vanished, bestowing themselves in the first nook they could conveniently find in the darkness.

Pausing merely long enough to recover a portion of the breath he had exhausted in handling the trunk, the judge beat a retreat from the cellar, closing and locking the door behind him, and the next instant he was heard taking the horses and wagon to the stable.

"Well, here we are, Nate," was the first remark of Buffalo Bill. "The cellar doubtless has windows. We must find them and cover them, and then we can note our surroundings."

He followed one of the walls a few steps, and then uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Here's a window," he announced, "but it is covered with a cloth—as impervious to the light as if it were hermetically sealed."

Such proved to be the case with all the windows in the cellar, and Buffalo Bill did not hesitate longer to strike a light, producing a piece of candle for the purpose.

The cellar was a large one, and contained various barrels, bins and boxes. The floor was of clay packed hard. There was a staircase leading into the interior of the dwelling. At each side of this staircase were small rooms, for liquors, choice fruits, or other important supplies.

"Let us now decide upon our line of conduct," resumed Buffalo Bill, after a keen glance around. "We are here to take the 'judge' prisoner. If he has any money at his disposal, I'll make him pay for ditching our Wild West. In any case, we'll take him to the nearest military station."

"All right, Bill," returned Nate. "It will not be long before he comes to look at his 'treasure.' In the mean time, we may as well install ourselves in one of these little rooms, without light, and be ready to witness his proceedings."

"Bravo!" commented a voice from a point not two yards distant from the representatives of the Wild West. "The programme is a good one."

CHAPTER XV.

BUFFALO BILL AND HARRY.

A FLASH of lightning from a clear sky would not have surprised Nate Salsbury and Buffalo Bill more than did the unknown voice breaking in upon their discussions, as related.

Yet they experienced no alarm, it being easy to comprehend that the speaker was a friend.

As they turned their gaze in the direction from which the voice had proceeded, a man came out of one of the little store-rooms of the cellar to which allusion has been made.

"This is a strange meeting, Mr. Cody," said the new-comer, with hearty joy, offering his hand—"as strange as delightful!"

"Harry Pollock! is it possible?" was Buffalo Bill's response, as he wrung the hand of his old acquaintance. "I was never more astonished—more delighted!"

He presented Nate and Harry to each other, and the couple exchanged very cordial greetings, as was natural to men who had been so much talked about and appreciated before coming together.

"This seems like a return from the grave, Mr. Pollock," resumed Buffalo Bill, as the trio seated themselves upon three of the many boxes occupying the cellar. "You are wonderfully changed! Were it not for the same old fire in your eyes, I might not have recognized you. We have had the pleasure of meeting Daredeath Dick, who has gone to our camp, and from him we received a brief account of your experiences at the hands of the Jay Hawks, up to the moment when Dick left you to go for assistance."

"Poor Dick! he's all right, then?" returned Harry, with a sigh of relief. "I mourned him as dead. He was so nearly used up when he left me that I did not expect him to live to ride a mile. Only his glorious, resolute soul can have carried him through such a loss of blood and such suffering!"

"As a simple matter of fact, Mr. Pollock," observed Buffalo Bill, "he looks rather like the ghost of Daredeath Dick than like the young hero I first met at your headquarters. In a word, he's as much changed as you are. But he's evidently all right, and only needs care and time to find himself fully restored."

"What account did he give of himself?"

Buffalo Bill gave the few particulars he had received, much to Harry's joy and relief.

"And now for a brief outline of your own experiences, Mr. Pollock," suggested Buffalo Bill.

Harry hastened to give it.

"What a strange story!" was Buffalo Bill's comment. "What you say about 'Althie' is especially startling, on several accounts. To begin with, I have a friend named Jack Pilot, a noted scout, rancher, prospector, and Indian-fighter, who had the misfortune to lose his only daughter, some fifteen or sixteen years ago, when she was a mere baby, and this girl bore the odd name of Althie!"

"Indeed!" cried Harry, with a start. "But how did he lose her?"

"She was carried off by a band of marauding Indians, who made a raid upon the border settlement where Jack Pilot was then living!"

Harry looked still more startled.

"Why, this agrees perfectly with the story of my betrothed!" he cried. "Her earliest recollections are of just such a band of Indians! Where is this Jack Pilot?"

"He's now in our camp."

"Is it possible?" exclaimed Harry. "This is really a strange concatenation of circumstances, Mr. Cody! What is more likely than that my Althie should be Jack Pilot's missing daughter? Where was he when the raid in question took place?"

"That's a question we shall have to refer to Mr. Pilot himself," replied Buffalo Bill. "Fortunately he will remain at our camp, in all probability, until you see him."

He related how Jack Pilot boarded his "Special" just before it was ditched, to tell him about a remarkable gold-mine he had discovered, and mentioned that he had more than half-promised not to leave the neighborhood until he had accompanied Jack to the scene of his great discovery.

"I am delighted to hear all this," declared Harry earnestly. "I shall look forward with great pleasure to a meeting with Mr. Pilot and to a further discussion of these weighty problems. But what are your other reasons for considering my revelations about Althie 'especially startling,' Mr. Cody?"

"Why, another extraordinary fact in this connection is the identity of 'Judge Clipperton'! Have you no idea who the 'judge' really is?"

"Only that he is Judge Clipperton."

"And Miss Althie is equally ignorant?"

"Most assuredly."

"Then prepare yourself for a sockdolager," enjoined Buffalo Bill smilingly. "The man who is known on these premises as Judge Clipperton, and as the manager of that rival cattle company, is in reality no less a personage than Rink Artilow, the chief of the Jay Hawks!"

The declaration was indeed a "sockdolager." Harry turned all sorts of colors.

"It don't seem possible," he exclaimed. "The two men are totally different in their personal appearance, and also, I should think, in their habits and modes of life."

"Nevertheless they're one and the same, as Nate and I happen to know," assured Buffalo Bill. "The difference in the appearance of the two men is simply a difference of false beard and wig and other disguisements."

"Are you sure?" demanded Harry, still a prey to the profoundest amazement.

"I'll prove the fact to you beyond all question before we leave this cellar," returned Buffalo Bill, with the tone and air of absolute certainty. "Nate and I have followed him here from our camp, or rather accompanied him here, without his knowledge, under circumstances I'll relate in due course, and for us the question of his identity is fully settled. By the way, I didn't quite comprehend from your hurried explanation—"

tions why and how you happen to be here at this moment."

"I came here," returned Harry, "at Althie's desire, as a precautionary measure against an overseer on the place named Berrill. This Berrill is madly in love with Althie, and has been rejected often enough to realize the hopelessness of attaining his ends peacefully. He has accordingly threatened to carry Althie off to the hills, and she feared he might set about the execution of his threat in the course of the night. I have accordingly taken up my quarters here secretly, Althie having given me an extra key of the cellar, with the intention of preventing the said Berrill from carrying out any such project as he has announced. I have two stout assistants outside the house—Jerry Winkle and young Hardee, if you recall them—who hold themselves in readiness to respond at a moment's notice to any call I may make upon them."

"Good!" commented Buffalo Bill heartily. "I am glad to know that you have taken these precautions. There are five of us, you see, in readiness to repel any villainy of which your betrothed or ourselves may be the object. But now to a matter that touches you quite as closely, Mr. Pollock, as anything we have mentioned. Are you aware that Sir Francis has come to America?"

"No," returned Harry, so startled that the blood left his cheek. "Have you seen him?"

"Yes. He's at our camp, keeping Jack Pilot company in the absence of Nate and myself. I have had a long talk with him. He could not endure quietly the silence which succeeded your battle with the Jay Hawks. Probably he did not get all your letters. I am sorry to add a fact that will give you a keen shock of pain, but perfect frankness is the first of duties. Your sister came to America with her father, and both put up last night at the 'Flying Tavern!' In due course—somewhere toward morning—Sir Francis found himself lying alone on the prairie. As to your sister, with the infamous tavern and its keepers—they had vanished!"

The shock was indeed a terrible one to Harry—one from which he could not instantly rally.

But he had passed through too many tight places and circumvented too many villains to give way at this late day to even such an affliction as the startling disappearance and captivity of his sister, and he gradually resumed the mastery of his emotions.

"Of course you do not know where she is, Mr. Cody, or what direction her captors have taken?" he at length demanded.

"No, Mr. Pollock. But she doubtless remains in the hands of Ralph Artlow and his family, in which is included a grown-up son named Bradd, who is almost sure to take a liking to your sister, and to become as disagreeable and dangerous as that fact can render him. I am glad to add that Daredeath Dick is already informed of the situation of affairs in this respect, and will immediately enter upon the search for your missing sister."

The assurance gave Harry great consolation, although he could not immediately master the terror and anxiety he had experienced.

"As soon as we have paid our respects to the judge," added Buffalo Bill, "we'll give all our attention to the missing girl. As he may arrive here at any moment, Mr. Pollock, I think we had better conceal ourselves in the room of which you appear to have already taken possession. Our wait is not likely to be a long one. The judge cannot fail to be anxious to survey his 'treasure,' about which I will now give all necessary information."

He led the way into that division of the cellar from which Harry had emerged, and in a few moments more the trio had secured seats, extinguished their light, and entered upon the further communications to which allusion had been made.

CHAPTER XVI.

FROM DISAPPOINTMENT TO HORROR.

His team taken to the stable and relinquished to one of his men, Judge Clipperton took his way toward the front door of his residence, with the intention of giving himself admittance.

To his surprise he remarked that there was a light in a room upon the ground floor which was known as his library.

He was at first a little annoyed at this circumstance, as he had often told Berrill never to meet him or light up for him, or to give any other indication of his foreknowledge of his employer's return.

Perhaps he was a little suspicious, too, or at least disquieted, for he stepped noiselessly up to one of the windows and peered through the blinds.

"Ah! it's Althie!" he muttered. "Can Berrill have announced my return to her? If not, it's odd that she should be stirring at such a late hour!"

Odd or not, he was delighted, upon second thought, that his ward was visible.

"I can begin telling her at once of my hopes, wishes, and intentions," he said to himself, as he turned away from the window, with a sud-

den flush upon his face. "I can come to an understanding with her this very night."

He drew a latch-key from his vest pocket and gave himself admittance to a hall, from which he passed into his library, the door being promptly opened for him by Althie.

"Ah, this is good of you," was his greeting, as he threw his arm around her and drew her to his breast, kissing her—a liberty he had never before taken. It seems my little girl was on the lookout for me?"

"No, sir," returned Althie, disengaging herself quietly, but promptly from his embrace. I did not know you were coming home to-night and did not expect you!

At this candid declaration, the smile faded from Clipperton's face and all signs of his late eager joy from his manner.

"Did not Berrill tell you that I was coming?" he asked, as he sat down.

"No, sir."

"Then why are you up at this hour?"

"I—I have had a little misunderstanding, disagreement, or quarrel—whatever we may call it—with your overseer," explained the maiden, as she also sat down, "and did not dare go to bed!"

"Not dare! Why?"

"I was afraid Berrill might make an attempt to drug me or carry me off!"

The judge was astonished and annoyed in about equal proportions at this state of affairs.

"Why, what is the matter with Berrill?" he demanded. "Tell me all, Althie."

"Berrill is angry, sir, because I have refused his hand in marriage," proceeded the maiden, going to the root of the matter as directly as candidly. "He threatened to carry me off to the hills and retain me a close prisoner long enough to extract an unwilling consent from me!"

"The villain!" commented the judge. "How dare he act in such a way, after I have made it as plain as day to him again and again that your hand has been destined to another!"

"He didn't seem to care for your anger, sir," pursued Althie. "He talked as if he could ruin you at any moment without the least trouble!"

"He did?" and now the judge looked more angry than surprised. "What can the rascal be thinking of? Where is he now?"

"I cannot say, sir. All I know is that he retired to his room at about his usual hour, say eleven o'clock."

The judge mused a moment in silence.

"Doubtless he is in his room now," he then said, remembering the late telephonic communication he had held with the overseer. "In any case, I have returned in time to rid you of his importunities forever. He shall leave the Pines early in the morning, never to return, if such is your desire!"

"Oh, I do not have the least wish to be disagreeable to him," declared Althie. "All I ask of him is to let me alone. I want him to realize that I can never be his wife, and that he must accept my refusal of his hand as a finality. These points duly understood and acted upon, I shall have no further remark to offer concerning him."

"Quite right, my dear child," said the judge. "I will have a talk with him in the morning, and see that your wishes in this matter are duly respected. How have you been in my absence? Well and happy, I hope?"

"Oh, yes," was the answer. "I am always well and happy, I believe," and a beautiful glow overspread her sunny countenance.

"How lovely you are, Althie!" exclaimed the judge, moving his chair a little, so as to command a better view of her face, and bending a more ardent gaze upon her. "There seems to be a radiance upon your countenance which I have never before noticed!"

How that radiance deepened at this observation!—as only the tell-tale blush upon the cheek of a young girl can!

"Have you missed me, dear Althie?" continued the judge, with a tone and mien he had never before exhibited in his dealings with her.

"Naturally enough—especially since Berrill began acting in such a manner," she answered with some embarrassment. "In fact, I have been wishing ardently for a day or two, that you would come home."

"Ah, it is delightful to have such an assurance from you, my dear Althie," said the judge, as he hitched his chair nearer to that occupied by the maiden. "It seems an age since I left you. I have been very lonely without you! Have you been lonely, too, Althie?"

"No—not exactly," replied the maiden, after some hesitation. "I—I was merely anxious to tell you my secret," and her eyes remained fixed upon the carpet, the figures of which had become a mere blur to her. "I wanted to tell you that I have made the acquaintance of a young gentleman who is very dear to me, and that I have promised to become his wife!"

If a bomb had exploded at the feet of Judge Clipperton at that moment, he could not have been more astonished, and he certainly would have been far less annoyed and angered.

"You?" he gasped, his cheeks rivaling the hue of his wig and beard.

The maiden assented in silence.

"Why, who do you know?" he cried. "How can you have made any man's acquaintance, living in such retirement? You must be joking."

"I was never more serious, sir!"

"Then who can the fellow be?"

"Excuse me, Judge Clipperton, he is not a 'fellow!' As to his name, it is Harry Pollock!"

"Harry Pollock!"

Language fails to do justice to the voice and mien with which the judge repeated this name.

"Yes, sir, Harry Pollock," affirmed Althie, as firmly as quietly. "I have heard you speak of him with some feeling, referring to him as a rival in business, but I soon learned to ascribe all such utterances to the fact that you are not personally acquainted with him. Doubtless you are already familiar with the outlines of Harry's history. He is the son of Sir Francis Pollock, baronet, and has become favorably known in America as the manager of the *Great Western Land and Cattle Company*. If you have the least doubt of his character and standing—"

The judge had been unable to interrupt these observations, such was the sort of paralysis into which this communication had thrown him.

But now he waved his hand energetically.

"The fellow must be some impostor," he muttered, with an air of desperation. "I—I have been told that young Pollock was killed by the Jay Hawks or Indians!"

In fact, he had believed him to be dead.

"There's only too much foundation for that report," declared Althie. "He had a terrible encounter with the band of Artlow, and received such injuries that he lay for weeks at the very verge of the grave. I beg to repeat that he is not a 'fellow,' and I must warn you in all seriousness not to make further use of that obnoxious expression."

"He really lives, then? Your lover is the real Harry Pollock?" queried the judge. "Tell me when and where you met him?"

"It was the day of the fight," related Althie.

"Harry and his friend—Daredeath Dick—had made good their escape and came to a halt in one of the most retired spots in the Pines. Daredeath Dick had been gone several hours in quest of assistance. The afternoon was wearing away. Harry hardly breathed, he was so weak, and had lost so much blood. At that moment I appeared to his gaze. I had been unrestful and disconcerted all day, and had prolonged my ride far deeper into the Pines than usual. I had also been drawn on and on in my zeal to gather a new species of wildwood flower which had fixed my attention. A groan had suddenly fallen upon my hearing, and in this way I found myself called upon to enter upon the rôle of the 'Good Samaritan!' I brought water from a mineral opening near at hand and dressed his wounds."

She paused in some uncertainty about the sentiments of her guardian.

He sat with his face averted.

"I realized in due course that he could not be moved," resumed Althie, "and I returned home and hastily gathered an outfit for him, including bed and bedding, and all necessary delicacies and medicines. I watched with him all that night, and was so fortunate as to find, under his directions, in the course of the following day, Jerry Winkle, one of his surviving cowboys in whom he had confidence, and with the aid of this man I soon had a strong and serviceable shelter erected over our patient."

"And yet you said nothing to me about him—not a word!" cried the judge, with angry reproach.

"I was not at liberty to do so," quietly admitted the maiden. "Harry told me not to tell a single human being that he lived or that I had encountered him, and my own good sense told me that I could not too zealously guard his secret, as any of the Jay Hawks, at the least hint of the real state of the case, would have spent a week, if necessary, to find him and kill him!"

Judge Clipperton sat as if petrified, only the wild glare of his eyes attesting that he lived.

A more terrible disappointment than that he had experienced is seldom endured.

For years he had been dreaming of the time when he could lay siege to the heart and hand of his ward, and bear her off to some distant scene where he could pass the remainder of his days with her in peace and joy.

He had never so much as suspected that she would even have an opportunity of loving another.

How suddenly this air-castle of his life had tumbled into ruins.

"Go on!" he commanded, hoarsely.

"In a few days," continued Althie, "Harry was completely free from pain, but how weak! how helpless! I do not believe he could have taken a step to save his life. His cowboy friend was even compelled to turn him from one side to the other when he wanted a change of position in bed. I was with him daily an hour or two during the first ten days, and then I began to go to him less frequently, for fear Berrill or some one else would remark my absence and follow me. Berrill *did* follow me this afternoon," she added, with a merry laugh, Harry having refrained from worrying her with any allusion

to the attack upon his life, which had followed her withdrawal from the camp, "but it is needless to say that he is none the wiser."

The judge still sat silent, a picture of mingled hopelessness and consternation.

Looking back into the events of the three months preceding, he could trace step by step the rise and progress of the maiden's love for the man whose life she had saved, and trace it with such clearness that he could only curse himself for his shortsightedness.

"And so—you have learned to love this stranger?" he finally demanded.

"With all my heart, sir. We propose to be married next Sunday, if you will give us your consent and blessing. Harry wants to take me across the ocean with him on a visit to his parents."

Again there was a long silence, for the simple reason that the judge could not trust himself to speak.

His senses were in a whirl, far removed from anything like coherency.

"This is very sudden," he finally said. "It is also a very great shock to me. I—I have long been only too conscious of your worth and loveliness, Althie, and months have passed since I began to think of a tenderer relation between us than that of ward and guardian—in a word, of the time when we should be husband and wife!"

The girl looked not only startled but shocked at this avowal, which was also the confirmation of what Berrill had told her.

Such a thought had never occurred to her!

She stared at the judge as if apprehensive that he was losing all sense and reason.

"Perhaps there is yet time for us to come to an understanding, Althie," continued the crime-stained impostor, after a brief pause. "Surely this stranger cannot have secured such an ascendancy over you in a moment as to cause you to forget all the benefits you have received from my hands!"

"Most certainly not," assured the maiden. "But I had never thought of you, sir, as a possible husband. I shall always feel for you as a ward should feel for her guardian—almost as a daughter, in fact—but my heart is no longer in my own keeping. I have given it to Harry Pollock forever."

A man less infatuated than the judge would have realized the fact then and there.

But what could such a monstrous outlaw know of the deathless devotion and constancy of a loving woman's heart?

He arose, after another brief interval of silence, making a resolute effort to master his emotions.

"Althie," he said, huskily, "there may still be a chance for a change of views in my favor—"

"No, sir! Not the least!"

"You cannot be wholly sure of that. Let us not come to any rash and sudden decisions, the more especially as you are still a mere child!"

"I have not reached any 'rash and sudden decision,' Judge Clipperton," declared Althie, in a voice and with a mien which would have been scornful, had it not been for her patience and her kindness of heart. "I know my own mind, and I am old enough to decide any and all questions for myself. My decision concerning Mr. Pollock, as also that concerning you, is final and irrevocable. It is a mere waste of time and breath to say another word about them!"

"Nevertheless we need not act hastily," returned the judge, with an air which showed that he had not the least intention of giving up the project he had so long cherished. "We shall have ample time to speak of this matter further. I have come home to stay—as might indeed be necessary, after what you have told me of Berrill's conduct. You will be pleased to hear, no doubt, that I have just realized one of my most cherished hopes and desires. In a word, I have just come into the possession of a very handsome fortune!"

"I am glad of that, sir, for your sake," returned Althie. "And this is why you will no longer be compelled to take those mysterious journeys which have so long puzzled me? Your overseer remarked casually that you have often been exposed to great peril during your absence, and even declared that you might be killed at any moment!"

"The miserable traitor! What *hasn't* he told you?" cried the judge, bringing a keen and half-suspicious gaze to bear upon her face. "All this cackle behind my back gives peculiar point to the intention I've long had—that of taking you, Althie, and going to some foreign country, where we can pass the rest of our days in an elegant leisure, far removed from all these little bickerings and vexations!"

"Why don't you take such a journey, sir?" demanded Althie. "You cannot use your newly-acquired fortune to better advantage. You can go all the more readily now that I am to be no longer dependent upon you!"

"Go without you, you mean?"

"Certainly. My future is already provided for, it being included in that of Major Pollock. I expect to cross the ocean soon, but I shall go

with my husband. Please leave me entirely out of all your plans and projects, whatever may be their nature, or you will make them only to break them!"

The judge bit his lips nervously, and took several turns in the apartment in silence.

How his passion for the girl had been increased and vivified by the discovery that she loved another!

A man drifting helplessly down the resistless rapids of Niagara could not have been in greater torment!

"My sister is abed and asleep, I suppose?" he at length queried.

"Yes, sir. She usually retires soon after dark."

"And sleeps like a log, no doubt?"

"Such is generally the case, as is to be expected, seeing how feeble she is!"

"Where is your Mr. Pollock?"

"That is a matter which concerns particularly Mr. Pollock himself, sir!"

"Don't you know where he is?"

"Not absolutely—no, sir," replied the maiden, beginning to be as apprehensive of the judge as she had been of Berrill.

"Does my sister know of your acquaintance with Mr. Pollock?"

"No, sir. I have never spoken a word to her on this subject."

"Have you seen Mr. Pollock to-day?"

The maiden assented.

She had also seen him twice since his arrival at the house, and very naturally she now began to fear for the result of this questioning, as she supposed him to be in the cellar.

"You saw him at his retreat, hiding-place, or whatever we may call it, in the Pines, I suppose?"

"I did, sir."

Another brief silence succeeded.

"To come back to the subject of my fortune," he then observed, as he paused in his walk immediately in front of the maiden. "Considering the lateness of the hour, I will refrain from worrying you with details concerning it. It is enough for the present to say that I have just brought home with me a great trunk full of gold and silver and greenbacks—a sum of money worthy of a monarch's admiration! This treasure is to be your dowry. Are you too tired to step down-cellar and look at it?"

Was he insincere?

Did he wish to inveigle her down-cellar to kill her or take her prisoner?

Such were the very natural questions which traversed the maiden's soul.

But she realized that his tones had been unusually sincere, while speaking of the "treasure," and that the enthusiastic interest he had displayed concerning it could hardly be simulated.

She remembered, too, that Harry had taken up his quarters in one of the store-rooms of the cellar, and that Jerry Winkle and the other cowboy were probably not far from the dwelling.

"Will you come and see it?" he asked.

"Certainly," replied Althie, believing that her compliance with the suggestion would gratify him and change the tenor of his thoughts. "You realize, of course, that I have no personal interest in this matter. Under no circumstances will I ever receive or use a dollar of this money. But I shall be glad to see it and congratulate you upon its possession!"

"Come, then," he said, with a gratified gleam of cunning in his eyes.

He was weak enough to think that he could arouse a love of dress and display in the girl's heart, after she had once seen the heaps of money at his disposal.

Lighting an extra lamp which stood on the mantle-piece, he led the way down the long staircase leading to the cellar, without remarking that his overseer, in his stocking feet, had glided into the library as he led the way out of it, and was now following closely and noiselessly behind him!

In his right hand Berrill held a short, thick bar of iron, and on his face was one of the strangest expressions of greed, wonder, and determination that was ever displayed upon a human countenance.

As was only to have been expected, the overseer had been listening at one of the doors of the library, ever since the entrance of his employer, and had distinctly overheard every word which had passed between the judge and Althie.

"Here it is, dear Althie," announced the judge, as he halted beside the trunk occupying the center of the cellar, without remarking how eagerly she looked around for a glimpse of her lover. "I am sorry to have lost the key, which must have jolted out of my pocket on the road, but I have brought a chisel from the library which will enable me to force the lock in a moment. Hold the light, dear, in such a way that its rays will fall upon the treasure as soon as the trunk is opened. There! that'll do. Don't be nervous. Now for a great surprise! Now for a scene worthy of the Arabian Nights and the Lamp of Aladdin!"

He applied himself with such energy to the work in hand that the lock of the trunk yielded

promptly to the assault made upon it, and then he raised the lid with an impressive gesture.

The face of a corpse lay exposed to the gaze of the baffled schemer—the face of the dead lieutenant of the Jay Hawks—the face of the man the judge himself had murdered!

The yell of consternation and horror that escaped the exhibitor of this ghastly relic was too horrible for description, and can hardly be imagined!

CHAPTER XVII.

A STRANGE STORY OF FATE!

It was a minute before the chief of the Jay Hawks could accept the evidence of his senses.

Not till he had caught the light from Althie's hand and held it to the dead man's face—not till he had turned the body out upon the cellar-bottom, with the make-weight of sticks and stones which had been placed with it—did he attain to a full realization of the situation.

His rage and consternation baffle description.

"What accursed jugglery is this?" he cried, quite oblivious for the moment of Althie's presence. "How can such a trick have been played upon me? Can Buskirk have been a traitor to me? Was there no money in the trunk when we carried it out of the Wild West camp? If not, what did it contain to make it so heavy? And how can this body have been substituted for what the trunk contained previously? This substitution cannot have taken place till we reached the little valley where I built the fire, and where—"

He checked this feverish monologue abruptly and held his light near the body of his dead lieutenant, surveying it hastily, beginning with the head.

A suspicion had struck him—a suspicion of at least a portion of the truth.

"One—two—three!" he counted.

Yes! the marks of the three bullets he had fired into the supposed Buskirk were all there!

That in the head was particularly prominent, the ball having shattered the bridge of the nose.

"I see!" he cried, still oblivious of the gaze of Althie, whose glances alternated between him and the corpse, in inexpressible horror. "A trick was played upon me! Buskirk was not in the wagon at all! He must have substituted the dead man for himself and then hid, at the moment I took that little turn to assure myself that no one was near. Then he put the body into the trunk, availing himself of that interval when I was looking for the runaway horse! The villain! He emptied the trunk of its treasure in that little valley, and substituted the body for it! I see it all! Oh, the traitor! Impossible to get back there before he will get away with his booty!"

He started up so violently, taking a rapid step toward the cellar door, that he came in contact with Althie, who uttered a cry of apprehension and terror.

That cry recalled the disappointed schemer to her presence.

"You—you have seen how terribly I have been cheated," he exclaimed. "My money has been stolen by those who were helping me bring it! I was never so shocked in my life! I am at a loss what course to take—which way to turn! I am dreadfully disappointed, too, on your account, Althie! I—"

There was a sudden stir behind the judge, as he stood paralyzed with consternation, and he found himself seized from behind by several stout hands before he could even turn his head, much less place himself on the defensive.

The next instant he was reduced to helplessness, his captors binding him hand and foot.

"No attempt to call for help, Mr. Jay Hawk," enjoined Buffalo Bill, sternly, "or we shall proceed to silence you effectively."

The judge glared a moment silently into the face bent above him, and an awful terror took possession of his soul. That one glance told him how completely all his rosy designs had miscarried.

Looking beyond Buffalo Bill, his gaze rested upon Nate Salsbury and Harry Pollock, and then upon the agitated figure of Althie, who was clinging to the arm of her lover.

By a desperate effort at self-control, the astounded prisoner was able to speak.

"Did you know that these Wild West men were here, Althie?" he asked.

"I did not," answered the maiden, who even in her horror of him did not wish to bear any unjust suspicions or aspersions.

"You knew of Pollock's presence?"

"I supposed him to be here, in accordance with a previous understanding with him," avowed Althie, frankly. "As to knowing that he was here, that is a different matter, as he might have been absent at any moment, if only to speak to the cowboys he has in waiting!"

"Traitor!" muttered Artlow.

"Enough of that, Mr. Jay Hawk," said Buffalo Bill, even more sternly than before. "The young lady is in no wise responsible for your capture, having had nothing to do with it. Nate Salsbury and I have followed you hither from our camp, or rather we have accompanied you, riding all the way in your wagon."

The incredulous, puzzled look of the prisoner at this assurance was something that baffles description.

"In fact, I was in the trunk when you carried it out of our camp," continued Buffalo Bill, "and it is needless to say that there was no other 'treasure' of any kind in it! Buskirk was captured, bound and gagged while going for the team, by Nate Salisbury, who lost no time in taking Buskirk's place."

The arch-villain began to comprehend the substitutions of which he had been the dupe.

"You will now comprehend, therefore," resumed Buffalo Bill, "that Mr. Salisbury and I were with you when you drove away from our camp—I in the trunk, and Mr. Salisbury beside it and figuring as Buskirk. We were with you when you reached the little valley and came to a halt—when you poisoned your lieutenant—when you fired three shots into Middleton's body, thinking you were killing Buskirk—and with you all the way here. Hidden beside the trunk and under the bushes with which you had covered it. Mr. Salisbury and I were with you when you telephoned Berrill, when you reached your stable, when you entered your dressing-room and assumed this false wig and beard, and when you drove up to the side entrance of this house and opened the cellar. How readily we got out of the wagon and entered the cellar unseen, just before you deposited the trunk where it now stands, is not a matter too difficult for you to understand."

A stifled curse escaped the prisoner, attesting that he fully realized the situation.

"And now we'd like to see him as he is," observed Harry Pollock, speaking for Althie as well as for himself. "Let's peel him!"

Buffalo Bill smilingly complied with the suggestion, removing the false wig from the prisoner's head and the false beard from his face.

With what interest all present looked upon the unmasked miscreant, will be understood without telling.

"He's Rink Artlow, sure enough," said Harry. As for Althie, she could only gaze in speechless horror at the ignoble features for the first time thus fully revealed to her.

If this transformation had not taken place under her eyes, she would not have been able to realize it, so great was the change wrought in the masquerader's appearance by the wig and beard.

As familiar as she was with the reputation of the robber chief, it could not have failed to shock Althie profoundly to see that the "judge" was identical with that monster.

"Oh, if I had known his identity," she murmured, "I should not have dared remain over night in the same house with him."

The prisoner glared at her a moment angrily, but said nothing.

"Of course his sister is an Artlow, and as such is aware of his identity," observed Buffalo Bill. "Doubtless she is weak mentally and morally, and has no objection to living here in elegant retirement, so long as her brother, in the character of the 'judge,' remains outwardly respectable. But what a home for your betrothed, Major Pollock!"

"It is indeed," assented Harry, as he threw his arm protectingly around Althie. "It is a realization of the old fable of the dove living with the hawks, or the lamb with the wolves. Fortunately our eyes are opened before it is too late. Her stay here is ended."

"For the present," suggested Buffalo Bill, "you cannot do better than take her to our camp."

"Many thanks for the suggestion," returned Harry. "We shall be ready to start with you in that direction at a moment's warning."

"Then let us start as soon as we can finish our business here," proposed Buffalo Bill. "I suppose the 'judge' has several men at the stable, Althie?"

"Two only," answered the girl.

"Have you authority enough over them to be obeyed without hesitation of question?"

"Certainly. One of them is in the habit of saddling my horse whenever ordered to do so."

"Then you had better step that way with Major Pollock—who can remain in the background, if you think best—and cause a pair of fresh horses to be hitched to the wagon in which we came here. As soon as you are in possession of the same, drive up to the side entrance of the cellar, and we'll transfer our prisoner to the wagon. It will be well to also bring, undersaddle, all the horses you can secure. By the time you return Mr. Salisbury and I will have looked through the papers and cupboards of the Jay Hawks. We may possibly make important discoveries—something that will help hang him. I wouldn't mind putting our hands on 'dross' enough to indemnify us for being ditched by him, as far as money can indemnify us!"

"All right," returned Harry, turning away with Althie. "We'll not be gone long."

He led the way up stairs, without noticing the figure that flitted away noiselessly just ahead of him, passing out of the house and hurrying in the direction of the stable.

This figure, as the attentive reader has already suspected, was that of the judge's overseer—of Berrill!

He had heard all—seen all—and was in a position to utilize all he had seen and heard, as we shall soon discover!

As Harry and Althie ascended the cellar stairs Buffalo Bill turned to Nate and said:

"I suppose the prisoner will be safe here while we step up-stairs a moment. Winkle and Hardee are just outside, and will be sure to intercept any approach in that quarter. I will give them orders to this effect."

He stepped to the side entrance of the cellar and opened the door a few inches, finding it unlocked, Harry having been there a few minutes before to exchange a final remark with Jerry Winkle.

As Buffalo Bill thus looked out, his gaze fell upon a crouching figure within the row of evergreens previously mentioned, and within a few yards of him, and very naturally supposed this crouching figure to be one of Harry's cowboys.

"We're going up-stairs a minute, Jerry," he announced, in a low whisper. "Artlow is here, bound and helpless, and you'll see that no one intrudes till we come back to him."

The man nodded understandingly, arising, as if to place himself on guard at the door, and Buffalo Bill faced about and led the way up-stairs to the library, Nate following him.

No sooner had they gone—thus leaving the prisoner alone—than the door of the side-entrance of the cellar was opened noiselessly from without, and a man came hastily down the steps.

This man was Buskirk! the treacherous Buskirk, who had been connected with the Wild West Entertainment nearly a year, and who had been of such assistance to the Jay Hawks in getting hold of the supposed "Treasure Chest," he having let them into the camp while he was acting as sentry.

With what a start of joyous astonishment Artlow recognized the new-comer will be imagined!

"Caution!" warned the prisoner, in a whisper. "I'm bound hand and foot! Release me!"

Buskirk drew a knife from his pocket, opened it, and complied with the request.

Artlow was again free!

Seizing his wig and beard, which Buffalo Bill had thrown carelessly upon the floor, as being of no account, the delighted miscreant hastened to fasten them in their places, at the same time explaining briefly to Buskirk the nature and bearing of the transformation he was undergoing.

As to the robber-chief's revolver, it was still upon his person, as he assured himself by thrusting his hand into his pocket.

How terribly his eyes lit up at this turn of affairs!

"How did you get free, after Nate Salisbury left you bound and gagged on the ground near the Wild West camp?" he asked.

"I was released by Sir Francis Pollock and Jack Pilot, who, in the course of a stroll just outside the camp, came near enough for me to attract their attention!"

"And they suspected nothing?"

"Naturally not! I explained to them that the Jay Hawks had left me in that fix. I am still a member of the Wild West Entertainment, and in perfectly good standing, in the eyes of all persons belonging to it, except Buffalo Bill and Nate Salisbury, who are of course aware of my relations with you!"

"Bravo!" hissed Artlow, grinding his teeth together savagely. "Upon this fact we can yet hinge weighty successes! Strange irony of fate!"

It was indeed!

The very man he had intended to murder a few hours before had come to release him in his awful extremity!

This very man could yet be of the most momentous assistance in the robber-chief's projects!

"And now to get out of this place," resumed Artlow, hurriedly, as he stepped toward the side-entrance of the cellar. "I'm anxious to get clear—"

"But not that way, captain," interrupted Buskirk, seizing him by the arm and detaining him. "Two of the Wild West men are watching within a rod of the door!"

"Then we must escape by the back stairs, passing through the kitchen," said Artlow, grasping his revolver significantly. "Make as little noise as possible. I'll light our way with the candle!"

The couple met with no untoward adventure in leaving the house by the route indicated, and soon Artlow found himself free again and out of doors—in what a savage and malignant frenzy of delight does not need to be stated!

"Ah! curse them!" he muttered. "The game is only begun! Thanks to you, Buskirk, I live again!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

OUT INTO THE UNKNOWN!

WITH a few rapid strides Berrill reached the stable of his employer, where he found everything quiet, the silence being broken only by an occasional movement of the horses.

A light gleamed faintly from a corner room appropriated to the stablemen, who were in the habit of passing the night there.

Reaching the entrance, Berrill knocked with great energy, calling the stablemen in low, guarded tones.

A window was promptly raised, and a head was thrust out, while a voice demanded:

"Is it you, Mr. Berrill?"

"Yes, Luke. I'm in a hurry. Let me in!"

The overseer's tones were crisp with authority.

He remembered that he was in the habit of being obeyed by these men promptly.

The man soon appeared, pulling open one of the sliding doors of the stable with his right hand, while his left rubbed his eyes vigorously.

"Attention, Luke," pursued Berrill, as he stepped into the stable. "Miss Althie will be here in a moment. Yes, she's coming already," and he sent a swift glance along the walk in the direction of the house. "She will ask you to saddle some of the horses and hitch up the balance. You need not refuse; you can simply offer some objections, reminding her how much they have been used already. You can tell her that her favorite is dead, and she will probably step toward the stall to verify the fact for herself. In any case you are to close and chain the door the moment Miss Althie enters it—"

"What's up?" asked Luke, with a startled air, infected, naturally enough, with the strange air of the overseer.

"The worst of luck," answered Berrill, with another glance at the approaching figures of Althie and Harry. "The judge has been arrested. Buffalo Bill and a lot of cowboys are in possession of the house. I am going away for a day or two, and will take Miss Althie with me—by force! You and Howell," and he nodded to the other stableman, who had just come out of the office into view, "must help me get away with her. We must suppress her lover, who is with her, in any way we can. Stick to me, boys, and I will give you the Pines and everything upon the place, in case the judge is hanged or shot, as is now only too likely. Understand?"

The two men had barely time to answer affirmatively, when Althie appeared at the entrance of the stable.

As a simple matter of prudence, she had left Harry under one of the large pines adjoining the walk, and not more than four rods from the door, so that she was able to make him out, although his outlines were too indistinct in the darkness for the stablemen to have done so, if they had not previously remarked his presence with her.

Luke hastened to meet her.

"Oh, Miss Althie," he cried, "I was just coming to the house to tell you that your favorite is dead in his stall!"

The announcement gave our heroine a shock, for obvious reasons.

Her favorite dead, there was one horse the less at her disposal!

"Is it possible?" was her comment, in a pained voice, as she stepped into the stable, without particularly remarking that Luke closed and secured the door behind her. "What can have been the matter with him?"

"He was evidently poisoned," replied Luke, giving the first theory he could invent.

"Indeed! This must be the work of that odious Berrill!" exclaimed Althie. "His idea was, no doubt, to prevent me from leaving the Pines! But he'll not be successful! Saddle the brown and black, Luke, as soon as you can."

"Sorry, miss," returned Luke, "but the brown and the black have both gone dead lame!"

"No! You can't mean it!" cried the girl, looking still more startled.

"It's so, I'm sorry to say," assured Luke, in a hypocritical whine. "Come and see them for yourself."

"This must also be the work of Berrill," mused Althie, aloud. "Never mind, Luke. Hitch up the bays in the wagon that came here an hour ago."

"The bays, miss? We turned 'em out to pasture this afternoon, by order of Mr. Berrill!"

The overseer, who was crouching behind a harness cupboard not ten feet away, could not help smiling at the ready tact with which Luke had enlarged upon the lie originally suggested to him.

"Then what have you got?" demanded Althie, in tones of rising desperation.

"Only the pair the judge brought home with him," declared Luke, "and they're that tired that you couldn't drive 'em a dozen miles without doing them up completely."

By this time Howell, the second stableman, had slipped on his coat and made his appearance beside his comrade, in readiness for any villainy that might be required of him.

"This is very strange," exclaimed Althie, who was equally puzzled and pained at the apparent situation of affairs. "It must be that Berrill—"

The words were interrupted by Berrill himself, who suddenly seized the maiden by the throat from behind with as much roughness and vio-

lence as he would have applied to a mad dog by which he found himself menaced.

"Tie her hands behind her, Luke," he ordered, holding Althie so tightly by the throat that she could not struggle, much less breathe.

Luke obeyed promptly.

"Now take the gag from my watch-pocket and secure it tightly in her mouth," pursued Berrill. "You'll find strings already attached to it, and have only to carry them around her head and fasten them behind."

The order had scarcely been uttered before it was executed.

"There! help me carry her, Luke, to the rear of the stable!" continued the overseer.

This was quickly done, Althie being as little able to defend herself as she was to call for assistance.

"And now to saddle my ponies, Luke," added Berrill, his tones husky with delight and triumph. "Lively!"

The two stablemen hastened to obey, leaving Althie to the care of the overseer.

"You may as well take things easy, Althie," he whispered in her ear, as she lay panting and helpless at his feet. "I've listened to your interview in the library with the judge and also to the developments which have just transpired in the cellar. I overheard Buffalo Bill's suggestions about hitching-up, and have simply forestalled you, that's all! You're going to ride away with me instead of with your darling Harry!"

By the glimmer of light falling upon her face from the distant lantern he could see how anguished and horrified she was, and yet how she scorned and defied him.

"The fact is, I am ready for just such a turn of events as has really come," continued Berrill, his voice sibilant with joyous triumph. "I have long realized that the judge would not be able to carry on his double life forever, and have made my arrangements accordingly. For several weeks past I have kept a fleet pair of ponies in the stable, in readiness for use at a moment's notice—and here they come!"

Notwithstanding all her bodily pain and mental anguish, Althie could not help remarking the beauty and spirit of the matched pair of bay ponies the stablemen were in the act of leading from their stalls.

They were scarcely fourteen hands high, and could not have weighed more than seven hundred and fifty pounds, but they were hardy, muscular, and seasoned, and testified in every look and step how intensely eager they were for action.

"Place the young lady in the saddle," ordered Berrill, as he took one of the ponies by the bridle. "As you see, Althie, it's a side-saddle I have procured with a special view to this occasion. You will be bound to it by a rope passing from your feet under the pony to the horn of your saddle, so that you had better hold on with all your might, as to fall will be to be dragged by your feet to certain death! These men understand the matter, as I have given them their orders beforehand. I swear to you that you are to be mine or death's, so take your choice!"

He saw by the very manner with which she clutched the horn of her saddle that she intended to avoid the dreadful alternative he had suggested, and he smiled grimly.

"Of course I will lead your pony," he remarked, as he mounted the pony appropriated to himself, and drew the bridle of Althie's over his arm. "Open the rear door, Luke, and we'll be off! After I am gone, Luke, you and Howell had better capture that man under the white pine—the girl's lover, who is awaiting her. Manage the matter in any way you please. As you're two to one, and the fellow is barely convalescent from a terrible illness, you ought to have no trouble about it. Hide him in some safe place till you see me again. I'll give you each a thousand dollars extra, if you succeed in effecting his capture. I leave you in full possession here, and as you are in no way involved in the judge's affairs—no more than I am—you need not brook the least interference from any one. Good-by for the present!"

Moderating the eagerness of the horse he was riding and that he was leading, he rode quietly out of the stable, at the rear entrance, and was soon lost to the view of his allies.

"Of course Pollock is waiting for you, Althie," he remarked, looking back at her, "and he's waiting in vain!"

The maiden sighed audibly at the thought, notwithstanding the pressure of the cruel gag which had been secured in her mouth.

"His patience is about exhausted by this time," continued Berrill, "but the situation is not so bad as it might be. For instance, if Pollock, instead of halting under the pine, had come to the stable with you, I would have shot him dead at your feet, before either of you were aware of my presence!"

Althie realized that he meant just what he said, and was very glad that Harry had escaped the terrible fate suggested.

"Of course I intend to be civil to you," added Berrill, as the couple continued to ride quietly onward. "I will take that gag from your mouth as soon as we are beyond the hearing of Pollock and his party. My plans for this hour

were long since perfected. I am taking you to a safe retreat, where no one can find you, where no one can interfere with me!"

Althie now realized only too keenly her situation.

She was going out into the unknown!

CHAPTER XIX.

ONE VILLAIN TO CATCH ANOTHER!

As soon as Berrill had gone, Luke and Howell hastened to the front door of the stable, throwing it open, with apparent honesty of purpose, and looked out upon Harry, who was beginning to be impatient, although neither uneasy nor anxious.

"Will you come here, sir?" called Luke. "Miss Althie prefers to drive out the rear door."

Harry answered by moving in the direction indicated.

He had heard and seen nothing suspicious during the time he had been waiting under the pine.

He was not even apprehensive of evil.

He knew that Althie had often visited the stable to give her orders in person, and he was perfectly ignorant of the fact that Berrill had arrived there ahead of her on this occasion.

Even if he had been suspicious of the stablemen, he would have taken it for granted that his betrothed could utter a cry of terror or a call for assistance, at the least manifestation of trouble or peril.

It was accordingly without the least foreboding of trouble that he responded to Luke's summons.

As he entered the stable, Luke closed the door behind him, and then seized him by the wrists, looking significantly at Howell, who had a rope in his hands.

There was a short, sharp struggle, and Harry found himself helpless in the hands of the two stablemen.

"Not a word," enjoined Luke, "or we'll knock you upon the head without the least hesitation! The girl is a prisoner, and has been carried off by Berrill, who pays us handsomely to prevent you from flying to her rescue! No nonsense now. We should be sorry to do you any harm, but you mustn't be disagreeable!"

Harry was too wise to exhaust his limited forces in a vain struggle, and wise enough to bow to the inevitable.

He accordingly responded:

"I am helpless, I confess. What are your intentions?"

"To keep you safe until further orders from Berrill," answered Luke frankly. "I must chain you to a ring in the floor," and he suited the action to the word, "but in all other respects you shall be well treated, so long as you are quiet and silent. Ah!"

The last word was uttered as a sort of yell of surprise.

The stable door had been thrown open suddenly and Judge Clipperton had appeared upon the sill, as calm and dignified of mien as ever.

Behind him came Buskirk, his deliverer.

"Have you seen my ward within a few minutes?" asked the judge, advancing a step or two.

"Seen her?" returned Luke. "Berrill told us you were in the hands of Buffalo Bill and a band of cowboys—"

"Well, he lied, as you see for yourself," interrupted the judge, with calm severity, he knowing human nature too well to allow his hirelings to suppose for a moment that there was any trouble about his affairs. "What was his motive for telling you any such rubbish?"

"Why—I suppose—that is—evidently he wanted us to help him, the lying fraud!" stammered Luke wrathfully, vexed and disgusted with what he believed to be the overseer's bad faith and treachery. "He has captured Miss Althie, with our aid," and he indicated Howell, "and has carried her off—"

"With what horses?" interrupted the judge, suppressing all signs of the storm raging within, while he ran his eye over the stalls nearest him.

"With a pair of ponies he has been keeping here during all your absences for six weeks past," declared Luke, with the air of a man determined to carry his revenge to the point of telling all he knows.

"To saddle, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir."

The judge turned to Harry, with a sardonic air and manner.

"It seems that we have both got left, my friend," he said. "What do you propose to do about it?"

"As you see, I am in such a fix that I have not allowed myself to form any plans for the future," answered Harry, coolly. "May I ask what you propose to do about it?"

"That depends," said the judge, turning again to Luke. "Do you know, Luke, the direction Berrill has taken?"

"I think I do, sir," answered Luke, quite unexpectedly to both Harry and the judge. "Fact is, Berrill has been coddling Howell and me for a few weeks past, and has promised us mountains

and marvels, or we should not have been quite so ready to do his dirty work for him. Very naturally, he has given us many points of his ideas and intentions, and, putting this and that together, I think it would be easy for me to follow him—"

"Even to his destination, Luke?"

"Even to his destination, sir."

"Then do so, and your fortune is made," said the judge. "Get the white and black into that wagon I drove home as soon as you can."

The two stablemen hastened to obey with a zeal even more marked than that they had displayed in the service of Berrill.

The wagon and horses were soon ready.

"You may put this man into the wagon," ordered the judge, indicating Harry. "I'll keep him with me as a bait, hostage, or other resource until I am again the master of the situation as regards my ward and Berrill."

Some blankets were thrown into the body of the wagon, and Harry was hastily deposited upon them, while Buskirk, at a gesture from his chief, took his place on the seat.

"You may get your rifles and revolvers and come with me," pursued the judge, addressing the stablemen. "Bring a couple of extra Winchester, while you are about it, and a box of ammunition. Lively!"

He stepped to the door and looked toward the house, his eyes gleaming triumphantly.

"Oh, Buffalo Bill!" he muttered, under his breath, as he shook his clinched hand in the direction of the intruders. "I have shaken off your clutch, and will soon have you where I want you!"

He opened the doors, took his place on the seat, and drove out of the stable, just in time to encounter another of his resident followers, a gardener, who had hastened from his cottage to learn what was going on at the stable.

To this man Artlow gave a few instructions, with a line written upon a slip of paper, and dispatched him toward the mansion, of which Buffalo Bill and Nate Salsbury were still in possession.

"Lock up the stable, Luke, and leave everything snug behind us," then said the robber chief, "and get up here beside me. You, Howell, had better keep an eye on the prisoner. Be prompt, both of you!"

And the next instant the wagon was following at full gallop the course Berrill had taken with his captive.

CHAPTER XX.

ON THE TRAIL OF THE CAPTIVES.

BUFFALO BILL had finished his explorations of the house of Judge Clipperton, when he heard a wagon rolling away from the stable—the same in which the judge and his friends had departed, carrying away Harry Pollock as a prisoner.

"Ah, they're coming for us, Nate," remarked Buffalo Bill, as he led the way toward the front steps. "We have simply wasted our time in this search. Not a dollar or any information of consequence."

He looked and listened a few moments, and then resumed in a tone of astonishment:

"Why, the wagon is going the other way! It is really leaving without us!"

The fact was soon established beyond all question, the noise caused by the wagon gradually dying out of the hearing of the listeners.

"What is your explanation of this proceeding, Nate?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"Some rascality, without doubt," replied Salsbury.

"We had better investigate. I noticed a lantern on the mantle-piece of the library. Let's light it and take a look in the direction of the stable."

The light had been secured, and the representatives of the Wild West had reached the front porch, when a man approached them, extending a folded slip of paper and bowing politely, with the remark:

"A line from the judge, Mr. Cody."

Buffalo Bill unfolded the slip of paper without ceasing to keep an eye upon the new-comer, and read aloud as follows:

"Absent in body, but present in spirit! We shall meet again!"

The two plainmen comprehended.

Judge Clipperton was again at large!

It remained to be seen how the late prisoner had made his escape.

Taking their way to the cellar, a single glance sufficed to tell them that it was empty.

Opening the door of the side entrance the couple looked out into the adjacent bushes.

"Are you here, Winkle?" asked Buffalo Bill.

Jerry Winkle made his appearance from behind a convenient clump of bushes.

"And Hardee?"

"Here, sir," answered Hardee, an intelligent and capable young fellow, who had been in hiding scarcely two rods distant.

"Didn't you understand what I said to you a few minutes ago?" continued Buffalo Bill. "I told you to keep an eye on the judge, who was a prisoner in the cellar—"

"What! were you talking to us?" cried Winkle, with a sudden start. "We supposed you to be speaking to a third party, that man between you and us—"

The two plainsmen made a gesture of disgust in unison.

They understood what had happened, and a few questions verified this view of the matter.

"That third man was evidently one of the Jay Hawks," declared Buffalo Bill. "He may have been Buskirk himself! In any case he has arrived here in time to release Artilow, who is now miles distant. You may as well come with me, both of you," he added, addressing the two cowboys. "Ten to one Major Pollock and his betrothed are in bad hands!"

He led the way back rapidly to the front of the house, where the messenger still lingered, as if charged by his master—which was the truth of the matter—to keep an eye upon the unwelcome guests until their departure.

"You may go with us to the stable, my man," said Buffalo Bill to the messenger, in a tone which was equivalent to a command. "Are you one of the stablemen?"

"No, sir—a gardener."

"But perhaps you know how many horses there are in the stable?"

"Probably half a dozen, Mr. Cody."

"Do you know where Major Pollock is?" demanded Buffalo Bill of the gardener, leading the way toward the stable.

"Yes, sir. The judge has carried him off as a prisoner."

"And Miss Althie?" pursued the questioner, without giving any sign of the pain and regret Harry's situation caused him.

"She is also a prisoner, but she is in the hands of Berrill!"

The annoyance these sweeping calamities caused Buffalo Bill will readily be imagined.

"You see, Nate," he said, turning to his companion, "how completely we have been scooped! Not only is Artilow out of our hands, but Harry Pollock and his betrothed have been plunged into greater trouble than ever."

He turned to the gardener, and continued:

"We shall want four horses, my man, and I may as well inform you that I shall keep you under pretty close observation until we are clear of these premises. At the least sign of treachery or attack, I shall make sure of you. You understand that point, I hope?"

"Yes, sir. But no treachery is intended," assured the gardener. "There are only four or five of us on the place, and I'm the only one now stirring. We expect you to help yourself to the horses. In fact, the judge told me not to refuse you anything you wanted."

Buffalo Bill and Nate were soon in possession of everything they required, the gardener having a duplicate key of the stable, and rode quietly away into an adjacent field.

Once out of sight and hearing from the mansion, Buffalo Bill drew rein.

"I am not exactly easy about the camp, Nate," he said to his partner. "There may be another Buskirk among our men, and it's more than likely that Artilow will rally all his forces and give us a call. In any case, you had better go back, taking Winkle and Hardee with you."

The suggestion was discussed in all its bearings, and Nate Salsbury and the two cowboys rode away in the direction of the Wild West camp, while Buffalo Bill dashed away in the opposite direction, making for the rear of Judge Clipperton's stable.

Once there, the scout produced and ignited a resinous fuse which gave a strong light, and began searching for the trail left by the ponies of Berrill and by the wagon driven by Artilow.

He was not long in picking up both, and ere long had the pleasure of following them to an old trail where the two joined, showing that the robber-chief was indeed upon the trail left by his overseer.

Buffalo Bill smiled as one who has found what he was seeking, and then extinguished his fuse, returning it to his vest pocket, and sprang lightly into his saddle.

Another moment, and he was dashing away like the wind upon the double trail he had discovered, with a calm energy which meant business.

The robber-chief and the overseer had not yet got rid of him.

They were to be called to account!

"I don't know that anybody ever described Buffalo Bill on a horse," says a writer in the *New York World*, of July 16, 1886. "I am inclined to think nobody can. Ainsworth's description of Dick Turpin's ride stood for many years as the finest thing of its kind, and then young Winthrop in his clever story of 'John Brent' excelled it in his ride to the Suggernell Springs. Either one of these men, given a month and a safe publisher, might have wrought Buffalo Bill upon paper. He is the complete restoration of the Centaur. No one that I ever saw so adequately fulfills to the eye all the conditions of picturesque beauty, absolute grace and perfect identity with his animal. If an artist or a riding-master had wanted to mold a living ideal of romantic equestrianism, containing in outline and action the mien of Henry of Navarre, the Americanism of Custer, the automatic majesty of the Indian and the untutored cussedness of the cowboy, he would have measured Buffalo Bill in the saddle. Motion swings into music with him. He is the only man I ever saw who rides as if he couldn't help it and the sculptor and the soldier had jointly come together in his act."

CHAPTER XXI.

A MYSTERIOUS PROTECTRESS.

THE reader will readily comprehend how vexed Althie was at being carried off by Berrill in the manner related, but she was far more angry than scared.

In other terms, her sense of peril was far less keen than her sense of annoyance.

Her sentiments of mere repulsion toward the overseer became a vigorous reprobation.

Naturally enough, she could not have failed to experience a keen sense of outrage and humiliation at finding her hands bound together and her features distorted by a painful and hideous gag.

No woman, of course, could ever forgive a man for such treatment as this.

If Berrill had been a little more considerate, or a better judge of womanly characteristics, he would never have permitted himself to resort to any such disgusting ruffianism for the advancement of his project.

Like all villains of his kind, however, he could take counsel only of his own vile passions.

For twelve or fifteen minutes the maiden's horse continued to follow that of her abductor at a break-neck gallop, without producing the least remark from her, not even a protest against riding at such a furious pace.

A good horsewoman, she said to herself that she could stand that sort of thing as long as he could.

Then, too, her thoughts were so busy that she hardly took notice of her circumstances or surroundings.

Was she going in a direction which was likely to take her far from all human beings?

What would Harry do when his patience in waiting for her should be exhausted?

Would the stablemen succeed in effecting her lover's capture?

Was there nothing she could do to free herself from this man's power?

Evidently not, while she was flying at that mad gallop over the prairie.

She could not even reach forward and rid her horse of its bridle, as she had for a moment ventured to hope.

He carried his head too low and too far forward for her to reach it.

She was still busy with all the problems growing out of her imagination when Berrill suddenly moderated his pace, allowing the ponies to come to a walk, while he looked back and listened.

"I do not see as we are pursued by your darling Harry," he muttered, with ill-concealed jealousy and malice. "No doubt he himself is in a pickle that must claim all his attention for the present. There is no need for us to ride as if we had wagered to make the tour of the world in eighty days. Neither is it necessary that you should wear that gag longer. May I relieve you of it?"

He rode nearer, and cut one of the strings which held the gag in place, and quietly returned it to his vest pocket.

"For future use," he remarked, as menacingly as smilingly.

"Permit me to hope, then, that you will use it on yourself," were the first words to which Althie gave utterance. "I know of no one whose chatter can be so well spared as yours."

For a moment Berrill looked as if he were sorry that he had given freedom to the tongue capable of such sharp comments.

"I expect to find you sour," he then said, "and I may as well avow that I myself am no longer as extensively engaged in the 'soft sawder' business as I have been during the last three months. Our future relations are to be outlined by facts rather than fancy, and it will be your own fault if the facts are not so rose-colored as they ought to be."

Althie did not reply, for the simple reason that she had nothing to say.

The overseer bestowed another searching glance or two upon her, as well as the darkness of the night permitted, and then resumed:

"If you had been a little more civil and pleasant, it might not have occurred to me that I have failed to disarm you. As it is, I may as well repair that omission."

He drew rein and dismounted, searching her pocket for the revolver he had seen in her hands in the course of the preceding afternoon.

"Having thus drawn your teeth, so to speak," he added, as he found the weapon and transferred it to his own person, "I need not leave your hands bound together in that fashion a moment longer."

He released her hands as he spoke, and then leaped lightly into the saddle, resuming progress.

The first use Althie made of her liberty was to detach from her arm a bracelet which had been a present from Artilow a month or two before, and to let it slip to the ground unseen from one of the flanks of her pony, so that Berrill could not have possibly seen it.

"We'll now move on faster," observed the overseer, in a tone of vexation, after a brief silence. "It's not a part of my programme to allow a pursuer of any sort to overtake us."

Althie smiled exasperatingly, but took no other notice of the observation.

The next gallop lasted nearly an hour, and then Berrill drew rein long enough to allow the ponies to quench their thirst at a brook they had encountered.

"You don't know where you are, I suppose?" ventured the overseer.

"Whether I do or not, I'm not obliged to make any statement on the subject," returned Althie, quietly. "If you know where you are, there is no occasion to fret yourself."

The overseer bit his lips in silence, and the mad gallop was continued at least another hour, by which time a glow in the east announced that a new day was breaking.

This indication of the cardinal points was promptly noticed by Althie, who was not particularly surprised to find that her course was almost contrary to what she had supposed it to be, and that she was in a region she had never before visited, as many and as long as had been her excursions.

Nevertheless, as she was *not* in the great Pinery, the outlines of which she knew very well, she was able to form a pretty good theory of her whereabouts, with due mental reference to a map in Clipperton's library with which she was familiar.

Again the horses came to a walk, and it seemed high time to allow them this rest, as they're paw anting for breath and covered with foam.

The day broke while they were thus cooling off.

"We shall come to our first halt in good season for breakfast," suddenly remarked Berrill, "and I do not mind telling you that you are soon to see one of the most picturesque retreats I have ever encountered. I first saw the place two months ago, when the judge sent me across the plateau with a large herd of cattle to a station on the Union Pacific Railway. I have spent a day here since, and had a man up here yesterday with a supply of provisions. The house has evidently been the retreat of some hermit, but I have no doubt he is dead, as I have not seen him or heard anything about him. By the way, as it is now daylight, and you have no chance to give me the slip in the bushes we may pass, I can remove that rope from your feet."

He drew rein again, and removed the rope in question, without further remark concerning it, and without even noticing the look of scornful wrath with which Althie surveyed him, as he thus removed the last of her bonds.

"You might have thought of that rope sooner, if you had possessed even the rudiments of common sense," she declared.

"If you don't like it, you might have complained of it," returned Berrill.

"You'll hear complaints enough later, I presume," said Althie. "For the present, I have been interested in seeing you act out your nature, precisely as I would be interested in witnessing the antics of the 'Learned Pig' or any other natural rival of yours, Mr. Berrill. Besides, I had my reasons for not asking you to remove the rope. If I could have got the pony's head away from you, at any moment during the last two hours, I should have needed that rope to hold me on!"

"You would have ridden so fast, you mean?"

"Yes. I would have kept the pony at his best pace, and the difference between your weight and mine would in the end have assured me the victory."

"Oh, it would! Thanks for the hint. I'll take care not to afford you the least opportunity for any exploits in that line, Miss Althie."

"Forewarned is forearmed, you know. You cannot be too much on your guard. You will not find me such an easy prey as you appear to imagine."

Again the overseer bit his lips nervously, and his reflections became so bitter and serious that he did not speak another word until an exclamation from our heroine recalled him from his preoccupation.

"What a lovely cottage!" she murmured.

"Ah, yes! That's the rustic abode I was speaking about," avowed Berrill. "Singular! The ponies have been here but once before, and yet you see how they turn toward the house of their own volition, and how they quicken their pace. We shall stop here for the present, and I know not how much longer."

"You don't mean that there is anybody here to serve up breakfast to us?"

"Of course not. There's nobody within a score of miles save ourselves. And this reminds me to ask you a question. Will you be so good as to get our breakfast, instead of moping and making yourself disagreeable?"

Althie bestowed upon him a curious glance—one he was at a loss to define.

"That request is one which would be classified under the head of 'cheek,' I suppose?" she remarked. "Nevertheless, as I should be very, very sorry to eat after your cooking, I will be so selfish as to cook my own repast, with a surplus for you. What are the provisions you referred to?"

"Oh, coffee, and sugar, and bread, and crackers, and a bag of flour, with a ham, and potatoes, and preserves, and—"

"Never mind the rest. You seem to have

made preparations on a large scale for house-keeping. What a lovely, lovely time you could have here, if you would only take the simple preliminary precaution of finding a girl who would care something for you, instead of being the conscienceless piece of stupidity you have lately shown yourself. But here we are. I may dismount, I suppose, and make a fire and get breakfast, while you take care of the horses?"

She suited the action to the word, with an apparent lightness which made him more her admirer than ever, slipping gracefully from her saddle and springing across the threshold of an open door that presented itself to her gaze.

Had it not been for her coolness and self-control, she would at least have uttered an exclamation of surprise, for she almost rushed into the arms of a kindly-faced lady of middle age, who was in the act of beating a retreat from the entrance.

"Fear nothing. I will protect you," asserted the mysterious occupant of the cottage, as she bent a startled and wondering gaze upon Althie. "You will see me again in due course."

And with this the speaker retreated to one side of the room, vanishing through a secret door that was immediately closed behind her, leaving Althie gazing after her with a strangely-excited and fascinated gaze, like that of one who has seen an unaccountable vision!

CHAPTER XXII.

ADELINE AND MRS. DR. JONES.

WHILE these things were taking place, what solution had been given to the problems with which we left Adeline Pollock beset?

After making her toilet, in the musty chamber to which she had been shown at the "Rocky Mountain Sanitarium," she descended to the hall, where she found Mrs. Dr. Jones sauntering slowly back and forth, awaiting her coming.

"I have availed myself of your kind offer to some extent, Mrs. Jones," remarked Adeline, glancing at her clean cuffs and indicating her snowy collar. "We have plenty of luggage at the station, but we did not care to load ourselves with it until we are better enlightened in regard to the whereabouts of my brother."

"Quite right," returned Mrs. Jones. "I have plenty of everything in that line, and it is scarcely necessary to repeat that you are perfectly welcome to anything you care to use. Breakfast is ready," she added, offering her arm to her guest. "The only drawback is that we shall be quite alone. My husband has gone to find Mr. Appleton, the constable of whom we were speaking, with a view to sending him with a message to your father and my son—"

She checked herself abruptly, as if she had been guilty of a slip of the tongue, and she hastened to conceal the fact by scaring away an imaginary cat from the rear door of the dining-room, which was open.

"You have a son then?" queried Adeline.

"Did I not mention the fact? Yes, a most remarkable boy, who has just graduated from Harvard, and came home last night. I was about to say that he may not be stirring for several hours yet, as we were up until after midnight, and he does not know that you are here!"

All this was said in such a natural way and with such apparent good faith, that Adeline almost felt ashamed of her vague suspicions.

"Sit here, dear," added Mrs. Jones, pulling out a chair at one end of the table. "I will take my usual place at the other end, opposite you, so that I can gaze upon your sweet face without having to turn my head. Ah, if my dear daughter had lived," she added, with a sigh, "she would have been just about your age, and just such a charming girl as you are!"

She seemed momentarily absorbed in grief and vain regrets, and did not speak again until she had poured the coffee and assisted Adeline to such things as she desired from the bounteously-supplied table.

Various generalities were talked about, such as the voyage of our heroine and Sir Francis from England, while the meal progressed, and the hostess confessed to being greatly interested in the account Adeline casually gave of her home in London.

The repast over, Mrs. Jones led the way to a neatly-furnished parlor, which had, however, the same close and musty smell as all the other apartments, suggesting anew to the guest that the house had long been shut up and only very recently opened.

"Here are writing materials, dear," remarked Mrs. Jones, conducting the girl to a center-table, "and how would it do to write a few lines to your good father, telling him where you are, and informing him that you are in good hands and that you would like to see him?"

"Had I not better return to him at once, under Mr. Appleton's guidance?" asked Adeline, a little nervously.

"Of course that would be the course to take if we knew where your father is," was the prompt reply. "The truth is, however, your father remains to be found, and there's no telling how long it will be before Mr. Appleton is able to find him."

"That's true," admitted Adeline. "Of course

I cannot be wandering around in such a state of uncertainty with Mr. Appleton. The only thing I can do is to write a letter to the effect you have indicated."

She seated herself at the center-table and entered upon the task devolving upon her.

"While you are thus engaged," added Mrs. Jones, "I will assist my cook in clearing the table and give her orders for dinner. By the way, as your sleep must have been most imperfect, would you not like to take a nap during the next hour or two?"

"Perhaps that is the best thing I can do," replied Adeline, who felt strangely weary.

"Then leave your letter here on the table, when it is finished," said Mrs. Jones, "and I will see that it is duly dispatched. There is no necessity for you to see Mr. Appleton. I know just what to say to him."

Bowing assent to this suggestion, Adeline proceeded rapidly with her task, while Mrs. Jones retired to the dining-room.

The letter duly written, Adeline left it on the table, in accordance with the suggestion of her hostess, and took her way toward her chamber.

What gloom filled her soul, despite all her efforts to look upon the bright side and remain hopeful.

How her ignorance of her brother's fate and whereabouts was beginning to weigh upon her!

As preoccupied as sad, she turned to the right instead of to the left, at the head of the wide staircase, without noticing the fact, and soon found herself in a room on the opposite side of the hall from that to which she had been shown.

Advancing to one of the two windows, she looked out upon the adjacent streets and dwellings.

What a queer place Rosedale seemed!

How quiet and deserted the town was!

As her glances came back to the room she had invaded, it suddenly occurred to the girl that it did not look exactly like the one she had so recently quitted.

There was a different counterpane on the bed for one thing, and the bed itself stood in a different location.

Adeline realized that she had entered the wrong room, and turned to repair her error.

As she turned away, however, her gaze suddenly encountered a diamond pin which had been stuck into a small cushion, in the midst of a variety of other articles, upon the top of a bureau, or case of drawers, near the head of the bed, and between the two windows of the apartment.

She halted, with a start of surprise.

"How singular!" she murmured.

Retracing her steps, she caught up the pin, with sudden agitation, and bestowed a critical and searching glance upon it.

It was not a costly affair, but it was somewhat peculiar and striking, consisting of a single stone of about two karats held in the claws of a bird.

"Merciful heavens!" murmured Adeline, her agitation increasing to a sort of wondering terror. "It must be the very same!"

She turned it over quickly, her gaze encountering the "hall-mark"—the English official indication of the purity of the gold—and underneath the same two small initials, "A. to H." ("Adeline to Harry.")

"The very same!" she gasped, with paling features, as she sunk into a chair, still holding the diamond pin between her fingers, which shook like the leaves of an aspen.

It was a pin she had given to her brother three years before, as a birthday present!

"There can be no doubt about it!" she murmured in a startled whisper. "How came this pin here?"

She looked at it again intently, turning it over and over, as if half-expecting to see blood upon it.

And then, with an involuntary movement, of which she was hardly conscious, she secreted the pin in her bosom.

What fearful visions and suggestions passed through her mind!

Had her brother been murdered, and had his personal effects been appropriated by his assassin, or assassins?

For a few moments she sat motionless and nerveless, in such a state of prostration that she could hardly have moved to save her life.

Then she gained her feet with a resolute effort.

Were her hosts themselves the evil-doers, or were they merely associates of the guilty parties or in some way innocently connected with them?

Terrible abysses, these—to open so unexpectedly before a young girl in such a situation as that in which Adeline Pollock found herself!

But they must be traversed!

The agonizing questions crowding upon her must be answered.

Calling all her energy to her aid, the girl calmed herself, as far as was possible, and took her way out of the room she had so fatefully invaded, traversing the hall with slow and noiseless footsteps and descending the stairs.

She already realized, with absolute certainty,

that very grave discoveries must promptly appear, as the natural and inevitable sequences of the startling discovery she had made, but little did she foresee the horrible depths which were so soon to yawn before her!

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE PLAN OF THE PLOTTERS.

RETURNING to Mrs. Jones, Adeline Pollock frankly informed her of the discovery she had made.

The hostess listened to her statement with deep agitation, but immediately said:

"My son bought that pin of a cowboy who stayed here over night and professed to be in want of money to make his way to Missouri. If I am not mistaken, my boy paid a mere trifle for the pin. In any case, you are welcome to it. How very strange that it should fall into your hands!"

"How providential!" thought Adeline.

She realized now that grave calamities had overtaken her brother, and that her own situation was one calling for all her watchfulness and courage.

"Of course," said Adeline, after a thoughtful pause, "I will indemnify your son, Mrs. Jones, for the money he paid for the diamond, since you are so kind as to authorize me to keep it, with a view as to its restoration to my brother."

"Oh, we want no 'demnity," declared Mrs. Jones. "But I must really beg of you, Miss Pollock, not to attach any suspicion to us in consequence of this transaction. Living in such an out of the way place, where the reign of law and order is a fiction rather than a fact, we're exposed to this sort of accident in every deal with strangers."

"That's true," assented Adeline, trying to dismiss all the painful reflections connected with the incident. "Let us say no more about the matter."

She restored the pin to her bosom, and after a few unimportant remarks withdrew again to secure the hour or two of rest she needed.

It was not surprising, however, after the events of the night and morning, that she found it impossible to sleep.

After tossing for an hour, she determined to take a stroll through the strange town of Rosedale, and see if she could not get rid of the gloom and anxiety weighing so heavily upon her.

As she reached the lower hall of the singular Sanitarium in which she had found refuge, she found herself face to face with a man who had just emerged from the dining-room.

He was richly-attired, wearing a dress-suit, including a swallow-tail coat and a white vest, with a white necktie, and looking as if he had got himself up to play a part in an amateur comedy.

In a word, he was as far removed from the coarse and ruffianly host of the "Flying Tavern," in dress and aspect, as the ordinary resources of the masquerade permit.

His face was beardless and highly-colored, as if he were addicted to the pleasures of the table.

A massive gold chain strayed over his vest.

He looked almost ministerial, at a mere casual glance—like a doctor or other professional gentleman, to say the least.

He wore cloth gaiters; and several valuable rings ornamented his plump fingers, not to speak of the diamond studs in the bosom of his shirt.

Puzzled at his aspect, which seemed a strange blending of ruffianism and ostentation, but yet struggling to be hopeful and to look at everything from its brightest side, Adeline saluted the new-comer with as much dignity as grace.

"I suppose you are Doctor Jones, the proprietor of this place?" she remarked.

"Yes, miss," returned the man, with an exaggerated politeness worthy of his theatrical attire, "and you are the pretty little stranger of whom my wife was telling me."

"Did you find Mr. Appleton?" queried Adeline, with strict attention to business.

"Yes, Miss Pollock, and your letter also. Both have been duly dispatched, and I have no doubt your father will be here before the day is ended."

"I hope and pray so," avowed Adeline. "In the mean time, I am so restless and anxious, I thought I would take a walk through this singular little town, in the hope of seeing something to distract or amuse me."

The doctor looked somewhat troubled at this proposition, but a glance from the front door, which assured him that no one was stirring, drove the shadow from his face.

"Quite right," he commented. "Such a morning as this tempts one out of doors. Do not go too far, however, or stay out too long, as you may have some misadventure. I may as well add that there are a number of lunatics in the place, patients of mine, who are considered harmless, and are consequently allowed their liberty, and that of course you are not to give any attention to the stories any of them may tell you."

This warning caused Adeline to hesitate.

"Perhaps I had better remain in," she said.

"Better still, do me the honor of accepting my escort," proposed the doctor, taking his hat from a stand in the hall. "I can spare a few

moments as well as not, and shall be pleased to give you all possible information in regard to your surroundings."

The walk that ensued requires no detailed description, after what we have already said in regard to the characteristics of the town.

Very few people were seen or encountered, and Rosedale did not once put off, at any point, that silent and deserted air which had already struck our heroine.

After traversing a number of grass-grown streets, and a park of several acres which had no paths and wherein thick grass was growing rankly under a dense shade cast by numerous tall trees, the maiden and her escort returned to the Sanitarium.

After dinner the maiden felt so weary that she again resolved to woo the "drowsy god," but this attempt did not result any better than that of the morning.

She found it impossible to school herself into that passivity of mind and body which are so essential to the advent of slumber.

Not to speak of her own situation, she could not help worrying constantly about her father and brother.

At length, finding her thoughts becoming more and more gloomy, and having a point or two she desired to discuss with her host and hostess, she again took her way down the wide stairs.

As she reached the lower hall she heard a mocking laugh in the dining-room, which reminded her strangely of one she had heard the evening previous in the "Flying Tavern."

"Yes, the thing'll now work to a charm," said a hoarse voice. "With that letter as a bait, we sha'n't have the least difficulty in getting hold of Sir Francis."

Getting hold of him!

How sinister and suggestive!

Naturally enough, the maiden stood as if rooted to the spot where these words had fallen upon her hearing.

"And once he's in our clutches," returned another voice, "we'll soon carry our p'int."

The two voices were male and female, and Adeline did not hesitate a moment to place them.

They were not only the voices of Mr. and Mrs. Dr. Jones, but they were also, she no longer doubted, those of her sinister host and hostess of the "Flying Tavern!"

"In the first place, remember," pursued the male speaker, "we are to force the baronet to pay us an immense ransom for his daughter and himself."

"Exactly," remarked the "weaker half."

"The next and final move is to force the girl to accept Bradd as her husband! This p'int once carried, the baronet will not be such a fool as to make any fuss about the money!"

Adeline was too startled, too fully in possession of the plot under foot, and of the real situation of affairs, to longer remain a listener.

She had recovered the control of her faculties and her one instinct was to use them to the best advantage.

She could not too soon make her escape!

Ere she could move, however, a wretched-looking whiffet came out of the dining-room and began barking furiously at her.

Rapid footsteps succeeded, and Dr. Jones came hurriedly into the hall, his eyes lighting up savagely as he took in the significance of the girl's presence and attitude.

"Ah, listening?" he cried, menacingly.

"And not in vain, I am glad to say," returned Adeline, meeting his angry glances without quailing, while Mrs. Jones appeared upon the scene. "You have changed your attire, but you are still Ralph Artlow, our late host of the 'Flying Tavern'! I know you both now, and only wonder that this recognition did not come sooner."

"Well, I needn't deny that we have met before," declared the doctor, with a coarse, jeering laugh. "It is true that you saw us only at night, more or less indistinctly, but our disguises must be decidedly clever, since you failed to recognize us!"

With a cry of horror and anguish, Adeline tottered to a chair and sat down.

She realized all!

The ignoble couple before her were still masquerading—more deftly hidden under their new disguise than ever before.

She was still at their mercy!

She thought of her father—of her brother Harry—of the infamous designs she had overheard—and her heart sank within her.

She saw no way out of her horrible situation.

"As you're now to see, miss," resumed the host, with the tone and mien of Ralph Artlow, despite the gay plumage of Dr. Jones, "it is very disagreeable and dangerous to know too much. You must allow me to conduct you to a different sort of apartment from that you've been occupying!"

He opened a door under the main staircase, and from the darkness beyond it, and even from the close, poisoned air which came out of the opening, it was easy to see that the door led to a cellar.

"Come, miss," said the ruffian, grimly.

The girl hesitated, as was natural.

"It will be in vain for you to resist," added the host. "If you fail to come peacefully, the old woman and I'll assist you in a manner that will be far from pleasant!"

Adeline was too wise to drive the hideous couple to extremities.

"I suppose you will let me know when my father arrives, if your plot is successful?" she remarked, as she moved toward the open door.

"Oh, yes," assured the host. "We expect him every moment," and he glanced at his watch, "and you shall see him as soon as he comes!"

With a weary sigh, Adeline resigned herself to the inevitable, and was soon locked up in a stout vault of the cellar of the Sanitarium.

"I'll leave you the light," said her jailer, referring to a small piece of candle he had provided for the transit to the cellar. "But I must advise you to be civil, and make no uproar. If you do, I shall remove your light and take any other measures that may be necessary to bring you to reason!"

Adeline responded only with a scornful glance, and the host retraced his steps to the presence of his wife, leaving the doors behind him securely locked and bolted on the hapless captive.

How gleefully the ignoble couple rejoiced over their successes! Another victim only was wanted, and for him their trap had been already set!

CHAPTER XXIV.

JACK PILOT'S TREASURE.

By frequent descents from his horse to investigate with a light, Buffalo Bill was able to follow the double trail upon which we left him.

Of course he went astray at times for a longer or shorter distance, but he paid such close and constant attention to his bearings that he was always able to retrace his steps and pick up the trail from which he had deviated.

At length, on examining the trail anew by the light of his resinous fuse, he perceived that it was no longer double.

The tracks of the ponies had disappeared. Only those of the two-horse wagon remained.

Retracing his steps again, fuse in hand, with the same care and patience he had previously exhibited, he came in due course to the point where the two trails separated at almost right angles.

The extreme divergence of these trails told Buffalo Bill that Berrill and Artlow were not seeking the same destination.

"The robber-chief is evidently bound for Rosedale," he thought, "while the overseer is striking out for some point less prominent. I can find Harry at Rosedale at any time within the next twenty-four hours, or later. As the rescue of Althie must take the preference over all other considerations, I'll give my first attention to the trail of the ponies."

To decide was to act, and in another moment the great trailman was flying like the wind in the direction Berrill and his captive had taken.

He had pursued the single trail scarcely a mile, however, when it disappeared at a small but swift brook it had struck at a sharp angle.

It being necessary to pick it up anew, Buffalo Bill slipped from his horse for that purpose.

He had ascended the stream a hundred yards in vain when he suddenly caught a glimpse of a man who was stealing through the underbrush, leading a horse by the foretop.

The action of this man attested that he was ignorant of the scout's presence.

Struck by the circumstances in which this man was placed, including the further fact that he was hatless and in his shirt-sleeves, Buffalo Bill instantly decided to follow him, although he did not suppose there was any connection between the stranger and Berrill.

Securing his horse to a sapling, the scout took his bearings by the stars and moved rapidly in the direction the unknown was taking.

His theory was already formed.

There was a camp near at hand, from which the horse had strayed or fled, and the man was one of the campers.

Probably these strangers had no connection with Berrill, but they were none the less worthy of a passing investigation.

After following the stranger nearly half a mile, Buffalo Bill saw the man and horse enter the camp of which he had so promptly surmised the existence.

There was a fire in its center, a large wagon at one side of it, and half a dozen men asleep on the ground beside it, in addition to a man, with a rifle on his left arm, who was walking to and fro in the shadow of an overhanging tree.

"You got him after all, Tim," was the greeting of the sentry. "I didn't believe you would."

"And this time he's here to stay," returned Tim wrathfully, as he produced a stout rope and began securing one end to the neck of the horse and the other to a tree. "If he pulls away again, it'll not be until after he's pulled his head off."

The horse was soon tethered to the satisfaction of his captor, who sat down on a log near the fire and began talking to the sentry.

"I was glad to get hold of him," said Tim, after several unimportant remarks. "I would be awkward enough if we were to find ourselves horseless, and them infernal hostiles possibly within five miles or less, and that ton o' nuggets in the wagon."

A ton of nuggets!

The remark naturally fixed the attention of Buffalo Bill, who had advanced unseen and unheard to within a few yards of the speakers.

Such an amount of gold could only come from the newly-discovered mine of Jack Pilot.

"But, 'cordin' to my mind, it's safer to lie hid here than to go on, as Hank suggested," returned the sentry. "Two o' them hosses would have been broken down completely if we'd followed Hank's advice. We've been driving too fast, Tim."

"Well, it's only natterai, seeing that we're so anxious to get this gold through to Rosedale, and get back to the mine for another load," declared Tim. "I don't s'pose Jack Pilot is looking for us, or that he's even aware that we've stolen his gold, but he's certainly absent from his mine, and doubtless somewhere in this direction."

Gaining his feet, Tim yawned in a way which seemed to threaten the final separation of his under jaw from his head, and continued discontentedly:

"I needn't stay up longer. Let me sleep another hour, and I'll then take your place."

"All right," said the sentry, with a nervous glance around. "Sleep as long as you like."

Tim took his place beside his sleeping comrades, after enveloping himself in a blanket, and in less than a minute was sound asleep.

Watching and listening a few moments longer, as if to be quite sure of his surroundings, the sentry leaned his rifle against the tree, gathered several handfuls of light, dry brushwood and piled it all upon the fire at once, with the evident design of making as large a blaze as possible.

Then he began harnessing the horses to the wagon, dividing his attention between the men on the ground and some point in the distance.

Buffalo Bill began to comprehend the scene.

The sentry was a traitor to those with him—just such a traitor as Buskirk!

He was signaling some hidden and watchful companions in the distance!

An answering gleam was soon seen on an elevation a couple of miles away, and the treacherous sentry smiled grimly.

"They'll come," he muttered.

Buffalo Bill watched and waited until the sentry had hitched four horses to the heavily-laden wagon, and then suddenly presented himself at the man's side, placing the muzzle of a revolver upon the traitor's ear.

"You'd like to live, no doubt?" said Buffalo Bill, in a low but significant tone, as the man's eyes turned upon him. "If so, lie down on your face in silence!"

The man gasped for breath, with the air of recognizing the new-comer, and complied with the suggestion.

"Fold your hands on your back!"

This order was also executed, and the scout bound the fellow securely.

"Now open your mouth wide," pursued Buffalo Bill, as he turned the traitor over.

The man obeyed, and a stout gag was duly inserted in his mouth and secured in its place.

"And now quiet and patience!" was the final order of the scout, as he raised the prisoner from the ground and deposited him in the wagon. "I'll release you as soon as I can."

Noting the direction of the wind, Buffalo Bill set fire to the adjacent grass and underbrush in such a way as to awaken the thieves before the arrival of the hostiles, and then he mounted to the seat of the wagon and pulled quietly out of the clearing, keeping a strict watch in every direction, especially behind him.

As little noise as the sentry had made in hitching up the horses, Buffalo Bill would have expected it to awaken the sleepers under ordinary circumstances. But he found it easy to explain why it did not do so. He had no doubt that the thieves had been drugged by their treacherous companion.

CHAPTER XXV.

EXTRAORDINARY DEVELOPMENTS.

We must now return to Althie.

For nearly a minute she stood looking at the spot where the strange occupant of the solitary cottage had vanished, as we have stated.

"How strange!" she then murmured. "All my life I have been haunted by such a face! by such eyes and lips! Where can I have seen her before? Who can she be?"

She sunk into the nearest chair, and her features assumed that singular fixity which characterizes a person in a trance.

It was as if her meeting with the unknown lady had opened unsuspected depths in the soul of our heroine, especially in her memories of the past.

"What a thrill her voice gave me!" mused the maiden, with a sigh. "It cannot be that I have heard it before, and yet what echoes it awakens! And how her glance charmed me!"

The step of Berrill aroused her, and she started to her feet, with the sudden pallor produced by a realization of the difference between her thoughts and the circumstances in which she was placed.

How jauntily and jubilantly her abductor came in, his eyes taking rapid cognizance of everything around him!

"Yes, everything here is precisely as I left it," he remarked, "except that I didn't leave the door ajar. I suppose it wasn't quite latched and the wind has blown it open. Evidently the fact has not been taken advantage of by bears or other animals," and he explored the room and its dependencies. "We can take possession, you see. The first thing is a fire. Then I'll bring some water from the spring near by, and put over the kettle."

He busied himself with these measures, at the same time addressing various remarks to his captive.

"You have doubtless noticed how well we are supplied with all the necessities of housekeeping," he observed, as he watched the girl admiringly at the task she had undertaken. "With an occasional bag of game, we shall be able to live here at least three months, without the least necessity of further supplies. You see how well I have arranged our future. You will not be long in realizing that I mean business. You can justly reproach me for resorting to force, but I hope to be forgiven in due course for that when you know me better."

"Are you particular whether your steak is broiled or fried, Mr. Berrill?" asked Althie, wholly ignoring his remarks.

"Not at all," replied the overseer.

"Then I'll fry it, and spare myself time and trouble," continued Althie. "I do not expect to eat any of it myself, and I am sure that a fried steak is good enough for you!"

"But what will you eat?" asked Berrill, biting his lips nervously.

"A boiled egg or two, and almost anything else into which you cannot introduce a drug or a poison," replied our heroine. "As I know how to supply myself with game, I expect to secure and cook many a nice morsel which I shall not ask you to share with me, and which you will have no chance of 'doctoring' to my disadvantage."

The overseer colored to the very roots of his hair.

He realized that Althie was on her guard against the most important of the measures he had contemplated.

"In other terms, Mr. Walter Berrill," added Althie, with sudden wrath and disgust, "you will please to understand that you must be extremely circumspect if you expect to remain here for even three days."

"Ah! on the war-path?" sneered Berrill.

"To the extent of beating you in the game you have entered upon—yes," avowed the undaunted girl, with a look of scorn. "You cannot always remain awake, and I shall hope to leave you whenever you go to sleep. You cannot always remain on the watch, and I shall hope to elude you as soon as your attention is diverted from me."

Berrill could not refrain from scowling menacingly at her.

He did not speak, however, until the breakfast had been placed upon the table, and Althie had announced that it was ready.

"You had better take your place here, between me and the door," suggested Althie, indicating a chair at one end of the table, "or I may give you the slip."

Berrill accepted the chair, after assuring himself that it did not stand upon a trap-door, and Althie poured the coffee, then seating herself to his left, in such a situation as to command a view of the sliding door which had come between her and the mysterious lady of the cottage.

She had expected to be able to remark some trace of this secret opening in the wall, but she found this hope wholly fallacious.

It seemed possible, too, that there might be a secret panel somewhere in that direction, and once or twice she flushed at the thought that the eyes of the unknown lady might be at that very moment scanning her features.

We need not pause upon the conversation of Althie with her abductor over their breakfast.

The remarks of Berrill ranged between conciliatory and menacing, while those of our heroine were constantly sarcastic, defiant and scornful.

Any one overhearing the interview would of course have quickly comprehended the nature of their relations.

It was with a flush of subdued rage upon his face that Berrill arose from the table.

"I must look after the horses," he remarked, "but let it be understood that I shall also look after you! If you take a step outside the door without my permission, I will chain you to the wall!"

The girl drew her slight figure erect, giving him a look that rendered a verbal response unnecessary, and he slowly withdrew.

She watched him to the cattle-shed under which the ponies were standing.

"He's gone!" she then ejaculated, with a sigh of relief.

The words had scarcely been spoken when the strange lady of the cottage made her appearance, closing the secret door behind her.

Althie was startled as well as fascinated by the change which had come over the unknown during the half-hour preceding.

What rapt wonder looked from her eyes, as she approached Althie, extending her hand!

And how that hand trembled in the maiden's! What tenderness there was in the glances the unknown fixed upon our heroine!

"That man, then, is an enemy and a persecutor," were the first words of the mysterious lady. "I have heard all that has passed between you. He has brought you here, supposing the cottage to be deserted, and little suspecting that I have been here more than ten years!"

"So long?" queried Althie, drawing her hostess to a seat and sitting down beside her, still holding her hand. I should have thought you would have been molested by the Indians."

"Very few of them have been here, and those few have not made me any trouble."

"And the white outlaws?"

"Those I have had reason to regard as dangerous have gone away as Berrill did, under the impression that the place is no longer inhabited. I saw him and his man here the other day, and saw and heard enough to make me curious in regard to their intentions. Imagine the surprise with which I saw you coming!"

"And mine at the sight of you!" declared Althie, turning her glorious eyes upon those of her strange protectress. "I was never so joyfully surprised in my life!"

"And now to tell me something more about yourself, child," pursued the unknown lady, continuing to gaze upon Althie's face as if fascinated or bewildered. "Who is your father?"

"I—I do not know," replied our heroine. "My earliest recollections extend to a wandering band of Indians, and it is believed that I was stolen from some border settlement."

"Ah! is it possible?"

The large, speaking eyes of the strange lady seemed to become more fixed in their gaze than before.

"Later I was sheltered by a childless pair of Indians who made a drudge of me—"

"Indeed?" commented the lady, in a barely audible whisper, her wondering gaze becoming more intense. "And still later you were rescued by a white man, who gave two rifles and a revolver for you—"

The maiden clutched the arm of the unknown lady as if life and death were involved in the words.

"In Heaven's name!" she cried, "tell me how you knew that fact!"

"In a moment, child—when you have told me your name."

"My name? I—I do not know what it is," answered the maiden hesitatingly. "I suppose it to be Althie!"

"Althie!"

The lips of the unknown lady blanched as she repeated the name, and her eyes grew wild in their unrest and anxiety, as she cried:

"What makes you think your name is Althie?"

"Because Althie had been worked into the collar of a garment found upon me, and which I have in my possession to this day—worked with red silk, in gothic letters—"

"Oh! Heaven! like this?" and the lady produced a piece of embroidery from her bosom.

Althie nodded affirmatively, too startled to speak.

"One question more, child," and now the lady uttered a wild, irrepressible sob. "Is there a dark stain, as of coffee or blood, in the shape of a heart, upon your neck, just above your left collar-bone?"

"As you see!" was the answer, as Althie bared her neck and showed the spot in question.

"Oh, God! I thank Thee! What joy!" and the lady raised her eyes brimming with tears. "Does not your heart tell you, darling? You are my own, own daughter!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

BERRILL'S FURTHER VIOLENCE.

ALTHIE was quite prepared for the announcement of the strange lady she had so providentially encountered.

Her own heart had indeed spoken.

Memory had asserted itself, and out of the living present had evoked an equally living past, which teemed with wondrous realities.

The voice now ringing in the girl's ears was one she had often heard before.

The eyes and lips upon which she now gazed had often evoked her hopes and soothed her troubles, in days so far ago that they seemed to be scarcely more than the phantoms of a dream.

"I know it is so, mamma," was Althie's response, as she nestled in the arms opened to her. "How the past all comes to me at this moment!"

For a long time they caressed each other in silence, their tears of joy mingling.

Thus had lain Althie in her mother's arms in other days, as she could now distinctly remember.

Thus had those loving eyes looked upon her.

"You do not remember your other name, I suppose?" at length observed the mother.

"No, mamma."

"It is Pilot, dear. Your father was generally known as Jack Pilot. It is many, many years since he buried himself in the great wildernesses of the Rocky Mountains, believing me to have been killed, and I do not know whether he's alive or dead. He was absent from home, you see, at the time of the raid in which you were captured. I was left for dead, and in good truth was barely alive, but I went in pursuit of the Indians as soon as I recovered consciousness, and did not so much as think of a halt until I fell insensible from my horse. Long months of sickness followed, and when I was able to return to the ruins of our home I could not get any trace of my husband."

Mrs. Pilot paused to caress her daughter anew, kissing her again and again with infinite tenderness, and then she continued:

"But tell me of yourself, Althie. Who has befriended you during all these years, and with whom have you been living?"

Reclining in the arms of her mother, without so much as a thought of the "odious Berrill," until she came to speak of him, Althie narrated briefly the principal facts of her history, as we have presented them to the reader.

At the very moment when she ceased speaking, there came a hurried step at the door, and the overseer made his appearance.

As resolutely as he exerted his self-control, at the sight which awaited him, he was only partially successful in concealing his wonder and excitement.

"Ah! a visitress!" he exclaimed, with jeering and jaunty insolence. "Whence cometh she?"

Althie had arisen promptly, assisting her mother to her feet, and she now faced the intruder with a sternness worthy the occasion.

"I cannot present you to my mother, Mr. Berrill, as you are an improper person to present to a lady," she said, "but I gladly avail myself of this opportunity of telling you that she is Mrs. Pilot, the wife or widow of Mr. Jack Pilot!"

The overseer recoiled as if he had seen a ghost, and carried his hand in a dazed sort of way to his eyes and forehead.

"Your father—Jack Pilot?" he stammered.

He was never more confounded.

He had received a few details concerning Jack's discovery of a wonderful gold-mine with hundreds of millions, and the first impulse of the ruffian was to bewail the fact that he stood upon such bad terms with the lucky prospector's only daughter.

Oh! if he could have foreseen this moment!

But he pulled himself rapidly together.

"From your remark, Althie," he said, as he inclined himself as profoundly as cheekily before Mrs. Pilot, "I gather that you are not informed of Mr. Pilot's present whereabouts. Fortunately I can supply you with this very weighty information."

"You can? You know where my husband is?" cried Mrs. Pilot, excitedly.

"I do, madam. He is stopping in the Wild West camp of Buffalo Bill, near Green River Junction."

The ladies saw that he was evidently sincere in these declarations, and accepted the information with a profound gladness.

"And it is needless to add that I shall be glad to guide you to his presence, if you will kindly accept of my services," pursued the villain, his brain already teeming with schemes born of the new turn of affairs. "Shall we start at once?"

"Not with you, Mr. Berrill," replied Althie.

"You can see at a glance how providential the evil you intended has been overruled for good. Had you not brought me herre, it is probable that I never should have found my mother. But since I have found her, it is almost unnecessary to add that your persecutions and intrusions must cease from this moment. Go where you please, but leave us in peace!"

Again the villain gnawed his lips nervously.

"The only service you can render us, as an offset to the wrong-doing of which you have been guilty," added Althie, "is to let us have the ponies for the journey to the Wild West Camp."

"Thanks for the suggestion," returned Berrill. "I'll go and bring them."

He went out toward the shed, remaining absent several minutes, and returning with a very dogged expression upon his countenance.

"Where are the horses?" asked Althie.

"I have hidden them where you're not likely to find them," replied the villain, "and neither your mother nor yourself will leave this place until we've come to a better understanding. For the present, I am going to lock you up in the cottage."

He hastened to close and lock the outer door of the principal apartment, and then stepped

out a moment, to roll a large stone upon the door of the cellar, which was inclined at a very slight angle only, and thus prevent the escape of the mother and daughter in that direction.

He was absent from the gaze of his intended prisoners only a few moments, but when he returned to the room where he had left them, they had vanished.

It was in vain that he explored the entire dwelling.

The ladies were nowhere to be found.

Berrill was nearly as puzzled as angry.

"They cannot have gone far," he muttered, as he began overhauling the various nooks and corners afforded by the dwelling. "I'll stake my life they've not left the cottage! They must have retired to some secret hole behind the chimney or elsewhere! In short, they're in the place to which the old woman retired at the moment of our arrival!"

This last conjecture was right.

The ladies had retired to the secret apartment which had so often saved Mrs. Pilot from insult or injury.

"But this little trick won't work," cried the overseer, in a savage tone, as he strode to and fro, searching for a trap in the floor and for some sign of an opening in the walls. "You shall not escape me, Althie Pilot! Come out of that, or I will set fire to the house!"

Of course there was no response, either in word or action.

"Come out, I say!" and his voice rose to a savage menace. "I mean just what I say! I know you are hidden somewhere within the sound of my voice! Come out, or I will set fire to the house in a dozen places and roast you alive! I'll warn you only three times more! Come out!"

The silence remained unbroken.

The ruffian could get no satisfaction by watching and listening.

"Come out!" and the voice of the infuriated man rose to a yell. "There's no use of remaining there! I shall certainly smoke you out, and kill you as you appear!"

Still no response.

"Come out! For the last time!" cried Berrill, after a long and vain wait. "Show yourselves on the instant, or your lives are not worth a candle!"

The silence that succeeded his loud threats seemed more intense than ever.

"So be it!" he cried, rushing to the fireplace and scattering the embers of the recent fire over the floor. "I'll soon give you a jolly roasting. There's plenty of the best of fuel at hand for the business. How quickly she blazes! Ha! ha! what a furrace!"

And in less than five minutes, as Berrill made his way out of the cottage, begrimed and half-blinded, its whole interior had become a seething caldron of flames.

CHAPTER XXVII.

NEW ARRIVALS AT ROSEDALE.

WHEN the robber-chief had got clear, as related, of the retreat where he was known as "Judge Clipperton," he could not help exchanging a few hearty expressions of joy with his allies and hirelings.

"That was the worst fix I've ever been in," he declared. "If Buffalo Bill hadn't delayed his departure to search my library, I should now be on my way to the gallows."

"Well, 'a miss is as good as a mile,' they say," returned Buskirk. "Pity we didn't make an attempt to turn the tables on Buffalo Bill."

"Yes, it's a pity, and too bad, and all that sort o' thing," avowed Artilow, in a cynical tone, "but it's a great deal safer not to intrude too often and too closely upon that too lucky bison. What could we have done? We scarcely exceed the enemy in numbers, and you must never forget that Buffalo Bill's a host in himself—an 'army of one,' as General Dodge puts it. I wouldn't mind shooting at him from a safe distance, if I were on a locomotive, or if he were asleep and unarmed, but as to a square, stand-up fight with him, you can put down a naught or a zero or an invisible mark to represent me in that line every time."

The robber-chief glanced at his man Howell, who was standing guard over Harry Pollock—the latter securely bound—in the body of the wagon and then continued:

"You think you can follow Berrill, you say, Luke. Where's he bound to?"

"I can answer that question a few minutes later, sir, if you will allow me to drive."

The two men changed places, Luke taking the reins, and for a few minutes the wagon sped swiftly forward without a single remark from any of its passengers.

Then Luke drew rein and dismounted, searching the ground just ahead of his horses and on each side of them, with the aid of the flame of a match.

"Yes, the trail is here," he announced, as he resumed his seat. "The overseer is bound for Rosedale."

The robber-chief started at this suggestion, his eyes gleaming venomously.

"That is indeed a good guess," he declared.

"I happen to know that he has been preparing and provisioning a hiding-place somewhere

in that neighborhood," continued Luke, as the wagon sped on again. "He has long foreseen, of course—after being rejected repeatedly—that he would have to resort to violence to make the girl marry him, and he has accordingly looked up a retreat for her."

"You are right," commented Artilow, more and more inclined to accept Luke's theory. "But what makes you name Rosedale?"

"The simple fact that Berrill has a house there, sir. Why should he go to the trouble of fitting up a hiding-place elsewhere?"

"I give in, Luke. Rosedale is the fellow's destination. We need not give a thought to any other theory than this. You may head for Rosedale and push on as rapidly as possible."

As these remarks had been exchanged in somewhat loud tones, so as to prevent the noise of the wagon from drowning them, scarcely a word of them had escaped Harry Pollock's hearing, and it was no little satisfaction to him to possess, thus early in the journey, a clew to his probable destination.

After rolling rapidly on its way nearly two hours, the wagon came to a halt, beside a beautiful stream of water, and the horses were allowed to recruit their forces, while Artilow and his companions built a fire in the midst of a convenient thicket, and were soon seated around it, discussing the situation and exchanging various narratives of their personal experiences.

Harry had been left in the wagon, and very little attention was paid him, so that he did not hesitate to expend all his strength in an attempt to free himself from the ropes with which he had been bound, but he toiled and struggled in vain.

Thanks to the rest they had enjoyed, the horses renewed their journey with considerable vigor, and at the end of another rapid drive the wagon stopped at the gate of a small stone dwelling fronting upon one of the public squares of Rosedale.

"This is the place," said Luke.

"And of course there is not a sign of life about it," returned Artilow, who had been scanning the house and its surroundings with the air of a man perfectly familiar with the town. "Either Berrill is not coming here, or we have outdriven him and he's somewhere behind us."

Descending from the wagon, the robber-chief made a thorough survey of the premises, but this measure only confirmed him in the conclusions he had announced.

"There is only one thing to do, Luke," he declared, as he returned to his men. "One of us must remain here on the watch, and the rest of us will take refuge in the house of a friend of mine toward the east side of the village."

"Suppose I remain here?" suggested Buskirk.

"I shall be pleased if you will," replied Artilow, "as this measure will leave Howell and Luke at liberty to take care of the horses and attend to various other matters."

Buskirk was accordingly left to watch the house of Berrill, while the wagon, bearing the remainder of the party, resumed its course, soon bringing up within the yard of the "Rocky Mountain Sanitarium."

"Glad to see you, Rink," cried Dr. Jones, lantern in hand, as he appeared and caught sight of the robber-chief. "I began to think you were never coming to see me again. I suppose you would not be here now unless sent by some matter of business—"

"That's only too true," admitted the robber-chief, with a laugh. "The fact is, I have a prisoner here I wish you to take charge of," and he indicated Harry. "I will tell you all about him later. No doubt you have a vault in which he can be safely kept until wanted?"

"Of course," replied the doctor. "Let your men bring him this way," and he stepped toward a gangway door leading into the cellar.

"You know I make a business of handling 'lunatics,' and I have just the place you want." He produced a key and unlocked the doors, through which Harry was soon borne to a cell worthy of a prison, the party guiding their movements with the light of a lantern.

"There! you'll find him to-morrow or a month hence—whenever you want him," remarked the pretended doctor, as he led the way up-stairs, after a door of massive steel bars had closed upon Harry. "Come into the 'office' and take a drink. I suppose you're tired, but I must say a few words to you before I let you go to bed."

As the men retired from the cellar, and darkness again resumed its sway there, Harry Pollock arose from the stool upon which his captors had placed him while removing his bonds, and advanced to the door of his prison, looking out into the rayless corridor, and listening.

He had exchanged a glance with his sister as he was borne past the dungeon in which she was confined, and he could do no less than accept the evidence of his senses, as inexplicable as was the revelation they gave him.

"Are you really here, Adeline?" he asked, breathlessly.

"Yes, Harry," came the answer.

The wild joy which came with that recognition needs no description.

Through what a long labyrinth of events and passions had the brother and sister come to that strange and unexpected meeting!

And how keenly they now realized that there is only one supreme Guide in all earthly affairs—the Great Master of Life—who confounds the plots of the wicked and overrules evil for good!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"COUNTING THEIR CHICKENS!"

LEADING the way to the dining-room, the pretended doctor asked his brother to be seated, and produced a bottle and two tumblers, pouring out liberal drams.

"We are expecting an important arrival, Rink, from one moment to another," explained Ralph Artilow, who was still clad in the suit he wore as a physician—"in fact two of them—and that's why we're stirring so late."

"What are they?" asked the robber-chief, as he removed his lips from his tumbler.

"One is the arrival of a ton of nuggets from a gold mine lately discovered by a man named Jack Pilot," replied the host. "I need not go into details just now as to how the news of this discovery came to me. You're aware that I'm in a position to keep posted. Well, getting track of the fact that said Pilot has been taking out fabulous sums of nuggets during the last few months, I have sent several trusty men, with a four-horse wagon, to kill Pilot at sight, and bring away his accumulated treasure. It ought to have been here before now, and I'm beginning to be anxious!"

There was only too much reason for his anxiety.

The treasure in question was that which Buffalo Bill had so daringly intercepted single-handed.

"I hope there'll be no slip in the matter," observed the robber-chief, finishing his glass nervously, "but you are aware, of course, that Buffalo Bill is again in this neighborhood, and that we cannot be too sure of anything until after he has left us. What is the other expected arrival?"

"No less an event than the arrival of Sir Francis Pollock," replied the false doctor. "His daughter is in my hands, and has given me a note to the baronet that'll be sure to fetch him. He ought to have been here last night—"

The robber-chief began laughing in such a way that his brother suspended his observations.

"What is it, Rink?" asked the host. "Something seems to strike you as funny!"

"Well, it is funny!" declared Rink. "Very funny, that we should get hold of that whole family!"

"What do you mean?"

"Why, don't you know who that prisoner is we've just deposited in your coolers?"

"No more'n I know algebray!"

"Well, he's Harry Pollock!"

The pretended doctor was never more astonished.

"How very singular!" he cried. "And we've shut him up in a room next to his sister!"

He took an involuntary step or two toward the head of the stairs, but promptly retraced them.

"Of course they're now exchanging their experiences," he declared, "but that'll matter little, since they're both as helpless as if they were in their coffins. As I was saying, therefore," and he proceeded to fill up the tumblers. "I am expecting Sir Francis, and—"

"And you may catch a Tartar instead."

"Oh, no!"

"A good deal depends upon your messenger," pursued the robber-chief. "Who did you send?"

"Bradd himself, and he had orders not to be caught napping. If there had been any serious hitch in the business Bradd would have returned promptly. The delay has doubtless been caused by the difficulty of finding Sir Francis, who would naturally be looking for his daughter."

"I'm afraid it was rash to send Bradd," said the robber-chief. "His face must be getting pretty well known, and if any of your guests of the 'Flying Tavern' have chanced to escape—"

"Oh, they haven't," assured the host carelessly, as he sipped his brandy. "They're either drugged to die, or the coyotes and wolves get 'em before they wake up, after we leave 'em on the prairie."

"Still, one of them might have escaped, and if such a man were to see Bradd, he could hardly fail to recognize him!"

"Not in the disguise he had assumed," exclaimed the pretended doctor. "Bradd is very clever in blacking himself up to represent a darky. He often figures as a colored hostler, and many is the nice bit of information he has picked up in that capacity."

As a matter of fact, Bradd was the "colored hostler" Adeline Pollock had seen in the stable at the moment of her arrival at the "Sanitarium."

"And so Bradd has presented himself to Sir Francis in the character of a darky?" pursued the robber-chief.

"Yes; and he's sure to catch him with the ex-

cellent bait with which he was supplied by the daughter."

"And once he's here, Ralph?"

"I was coming to that," said the host, producing cigars and proceeding to light one. "The baronet is very wealthy and can readily raise millions of dollars. Now look at it! Here's his daughter in our hands—his son also! With his arrival we shall have the 'whole family,' as you suggested a moment ago."

"Ah, I see!" cried the robber-chief, his eyes gleaming appreciatively. "You are going to demand a pile of money for restoring the Pollocks to their freedom?"

"Exactly! By the way, what are your intentions concerning the son?"

"I'll tell you. You know that I have long been intending to wed Althie, my fair ward?"

The brother nodded.

"Well, she's put my fat in the fire by falling in love with Harry! In fact, she saved his life on that fatal day when we wiped out the Great Western Land and Cattle Company, and has been nursing him in secret ever since! Meanwhile, my overseer, Berrill, has fallen madly in love with the girl and has carried her off to some unknown destination. I had reason to think Berrill would come to his house in Rose-dale, and that is the principal reason of my presence. As to Harry, I had a vague idea of forcing the girl to marry me, if I can get hold of her, by threatening him with death."

"I see. You have taken him prisoner with the notion of turning him to account at some future time," commented the pretended doctor, thoughtfully. "The best thing to do with him is to demand a ransom for him. You'll never be able to turn him to account in your dealings with the girl, who is doubtless out of your hands."

"No, Ralph," and the eyes of the robber-chief blazed like fire. "I'll have that girl, if I have to devote a year to the hunt for her! We'll keep Harry a prisoner until she is safe in my clutches."

"And then we can let him run, in accordance with a general arrangement I will make with Sir Francis for a ransom. Leave it all to me, Rink. There is a second point to be adjusted, and I may as well mention it. Bradd has fallen in love with the daughter, and I can do no less than humor his wishes. His mind is made up not to let the girl go out of our hands until she has become his wife!"

"She'll never consent, Ralph."

"Then so much the worse for her," declared the pretended doctor grimly. "She'll accept him, or die!"

At this moment a clatter of hoofs was heard leading up to the door of the "Sanitarium," and the next instant three men came hurriedly into the wide hall.

The foremost was Bradd Artlow, in his character of "colored hostler," and the two men following him were Sir Francis Pollock and Jack Pilot.

The latter had come out of sympathy with the baronet, a cordial friendship having arisen between them, as brief as had been their acquaintance.

"Doctor Jones," said the disguised Bradd, as he led the way toward his father, "this gentleman is Sir Francis," and he indicated the baronet. "I've had a long search to find him."

"Doctor Jones" received the distinguished stranger in a style corresponding to the character in which the former was figuring, and then turned a glance of inquiry upon Mr. Pilot.

"This other gentleman," said Bradd, by way of introduction, "is Mr. Jack Pilot who has been stopping a few days at the Wild West camp."

"Doctor Jones" greeted his visitor blandly, but not without an unusual display of nervousness, and with a marked change of color.

To say the least, Jack was one more than the scheming miscreant had expected to see.

"Sir Francis would not come without him, sir, or rather Mr. Pilot would not let the baronet come alone," explained Bradd, by the way of confining the tempest he saw gathering on the brow of his father. "Mr. Pilot fancied he might be useful."

"The more especially as I saw that your messenger, Doctor Jones, was a white fellow blacked up," said Jack Pilot bluntly, after he had nodded amicably to the pretended doctor and taken the chair proffered him.

"The young fellow is my son," explained the latter, taking the bull by the horns, "and I sent him in that disguise as a matter of precaution and safety. If there was anything wrong in the step, Mr. Pilot, please hold me alone responsible for it."

"Of course my first thought and question, Dr. Jones, must be concerning my daughter," said the baronet eagerly. "Is she here?"

"She is, Sir Francis, and well and safe. Would you like to see her?"

"Is she awake at this hour?"

"Naturally, since she expects you, and is talking with my wife in the parlor. This way, Sir Francis."

He led the way toward the dining-room, and the baronet followed him.

The latter had barely set foot into the room in question, when the pretended doctor touched a spring which operated a trap-door, and the next instant the baronet shot downward into a box shaped like the smallest half of a coffin, and not much bigger than one—a long box, a little taller than himself, in which he found himself wedged so tightly that he was perfectly helpless.

The wild cry of consternation that came from him will be readily imagined.

"Ah! what's up?" cried Jack Pilot, as he gained his feet.

It was all he could say, for at that moment he was seized by the robber-chief and Bradd, who, with the aid of the pretended doctor, soon overpowered the feeble old man, and bound him hand and foot.

Another minute, and the two friends were locked up in the vault next to that occupied by Adeline, who had recognized her father, as had also Harry, at the moment when the tunnel-shaped box, detachable from its rests, was brought into their presence, with the struggling and screaming baronet in it.

It is easy to imagine the horror of the Pollocks and Jack Pilot, as they were left to themselves, and their captors took their way up the cellar-stairs.

"There! the thing's done!" cried the pretended doctor in the wildest glee, as he reached the hall where his wife stood awaiting him. "Our harvest is at hand."

It was indeed!

CHAPTER XXIX.

ALTHIE AND BUFFALO BILL.

WHILE these things were transpiring, what had befallen Althie Pilot at the hands of her rejected suitor, whom we left at the moment he emerged from the cottage he had fired?

Delighted with the rapid progress the flames were making, the overseer began making the circuit of the house, with his rifle in readiness for use against any unexpected intruder.

He felt sure that the girl and her mother could not escape him.

He was certain to see them if they emerged from the burning dwelling, and he knew human nature too well to fear for a moment that they would rather be burned alive than to fall into even his clutches.

The worst passions of the ruffian's nature were now in the ascendant, and he was resolved to kill both Althie and her mother sooner than to let them make their escape.

But of course he did not expect to carry matters to any such extremity.

That he would readily terrorize Althie, especially if he utilized the presence of her mother, he did not doubt.

Sooner or later they'd have to come to it.

"They're now in a box from which there can be but one way of escape," he muttered jubilantly. "They can stay there till they're singed, if they want to, but they'll have to come out. No doubt—"

He was interrupted by a grand crash of wood and glass at one of the two windows facing him, and Althie sprang into view as lightly as gracefully, holding her mother by the hand.

She had never looked more dazzling to her persecutor than she did at that moment, as she stood framed in the sash of the window she had destroyed.

"Ah! delighted!" cried Berrill, bounding forward. "Do not jump. Let me assist you."

Ignoring him, Althie leaped to the ground, facing about, and gently assisting her mother.

"Just in time," cried the overseer, as Mrs. Pilot reached the ground. "If you had delayed another minute! See how scorched you are. The old rookery is like a piece of tinder. The roof'll fall in before you can secure your safety if you do not hurry."

He hovered about the couple, handling his rifle nervously, while the maiden assisted her mother to a crest of sward at the top of a bank a few rods away, and seated herself beside her.

"There! you've been wise in time, you see," cried Berrill, as a large portion of the roof tumbled into the seething caldron of flames the cottage presented. "Suppose—"

"Suppose you withdraw a few yards at least," interrupted Althie, "and leave us in peace? We have no use whatever for your impudent chatter. You have made yourself as disagreeable as you possibly can, going so far as to burn that lovely cottage, which even the most wicked of the red-skins have so long respected."

"True, Althie, but it's all for love—an excess of zeal unduly warped by the celestial fires of Cupid," declared the maudlin reprobate. "You should have made your peace with me sooner. You certainly had the chance."

"Leave us, I say," returned Althie. "We have nothing more to say to you."

Rebuffed and angry, but none the less determined, the ruffian retreated to a rock a few paces from the ladies, and sat down upon it, rifle in hand, facing them.

Their revelations and explanations were not yet exhausted, no more than were their ardent caresses, for they talked incessantly, in tones

too low to reach the listening ears, and again and again did their lips meet and their arms entwined, while their eyes met in long, loving glances.

The more he looked, and the longer he waited, the more disgusted did Berrill become. Time was hurrying on, and nothing was being done. Some enemy might turn up at any moment.

The ruffian was anxious to have his relations to Althie take a more promising and agreeable complexion.

"Of course you'd sit there and talk forever, if I'd let you," he finally said, shifting his rifle uneasily. "But it is about time we come to some sort of an understanding. You've gained nothing by defying me, Althie, unless you call it a gain to have the roof burned over your head, and you'll gain just as little by defying me in the future. If you've got half as much sense as beauty, or if you care an iota of a single thought for your mother, you ought to realize that the old question's coming up fiercer and fiercer with every moment of delay! Out of the house is not out of sight or out of my hands! You're still my prisoners, both of you!"

Althie stirred uneasily, her gaze turning upon his dark face, as she realized the force of the remark.

Evidently, as he had said, the old question was still uppermost.

The fight was still on!

"Here you are," resumed the ruffian, with a grim smile. "A couple of lone women, with nothing but the clothes you stand in—with no shelter, nothing to eat, no horse to ride, no conveyance of any kind. Here you are, I say, in the midst of the wilderness, where no one lives, where no white man shows himself from one end of the year to another, where only prowling coyotes and wolves, or the equally terrible red-skins, are likely to put in an appearance. You see, therefore, how helpless you are—how entirely you are dependent upon me for assistance, and how entirely you are at my mercy!"

There was no denying it.

The face of Mrs. Pilot grew pale with anxiety, as she realized her daughter's unmistakable peril, to say nothing of her own.

What would become of them, with her feeble strength, even if they could get rid of this terrible man?

How many weary miles must be traversed before they could reach even the borders of civilization!

"I see by your very looks that you begin to comprehend me," continued Berrill, his grim smile deepening, as another grand crash attested that the entire cottage had fallen in, and was now a mass of smoldering ruins. "You are helpless, Althie! I ask you again to marry me! Consent, and I will bring you the ponies, and take every other possible measure for your comfort and safety. Refuse, and I swear that neither you nor your mother shall ever leave this solitude!"

"A fine style of wooing," returned the maiden scornfully. "You have mistaken the nature of our emotion. We naturally shrink from death, at such a moment, when we have just found each other, but death would be a thousand times preferable to the fate you are pleased to offer! Once more, and for the last time, I warn you to go your way and leave us in peace."

She arose, as did her mother, and the two began moving away—almost at random, perhaps, and doubtless without any fixed plan of action, as much must necessarily be left to chance and circumstance in such a situation as that in which they found themselves.

"Well, what does that move signify?" sneered Berrill, as he also arose and followed them, tossing his rifle into the hollow of his arm. "If you walk on all day, you will not come to a house or encounter a human being. I can walk as far you can, and it will not be difficult for me to live where you would starve. Turn which way you will, you'll find me at your heels. Do what you will, you cannot escape me!"

The ladies continued to walk on, paying very little heed to these adjurations, and for a few minutes the overseer continued to follow them in silence.

As was natural, however, he soon tired of this, under the feverish impatience that consumed him, and he resolved to bring the matter in hand to a conclusion.

"I must ask you to hear and heed me," he cried, as he suddenly bounded forward and placed himself in the path of the mother and daughter. "Stop, just where you are!" and he raised his rifle menacingly.

The impression he produced, particularly upon Mrs. Pilot, was so marked that he believed a brisk, bold show of violence would not fail to be effective, and he hastened to add:

"Halt, I say! Another step and you die!"

The words had scarcely ceased to echo, when the rifle was torn from the hand of the overseer, and he found himself flung to the ground with such force as to nearly dash the breath from his body.

"Buffalo Bill!" cried Althie, in the wildest delight and surprise, as her gaze rested upon the new-comer, who had bounded out of an ad-

jacent group of bushes, from which he had been momentarily watching the scene.

It was indeed the great plainsman who had come to the rescue at such a critical moment.

His hands half-raised, as if he were tempted to slay the ruffian who groveled at his feet; his commanding frame drawn to its full height; his keen eyes ablaze; his face a mirror of the emotions by which he was actuated—how gloriously strong and resolute he appeared to Mrs. Pilot and Althie at that moment.

One glance at him was enough to cause both of the ladies to dismiss all their agitation and terror, and to acquire the sweet consciousness of being safe.

"How came you to be here so opportunely, Mr. Cody?" cried Althie, as she shook hands with her deliverer.

"I was passing at no great distance, and saw the flame of yonder burning house. It seemed to me, naturally, that I had better see if I could be of any use here."

The maiden could not help wondering at the singular sequences which are so generally involved in all earthly matters.

For instance, if the overseer had not fired the cottage, with the intention of capturing the ladies, it is doubtful if Buffalo Bill would have arrived at the scene of violence in time to capture him!

"Allow me to present you to my mother, Mr. Cody," resumed Althie.

"What! Mrs. Jack Pilot!" returned the rescuer, with cordial delight. "This is a joyous surprise, I assure you. How delighted your husband will be, Mrs. Pilot. Down, there! down on your face, dog!" he added, addressing Berrill. "Don't dare to even look at these ladies, unless you wish to feel the butt of my gun between your eyes. Down!"

Berrill knew that another glance upward would be a serious matter, and he lost no time in assuming the desired meekness of attitude and aspect.

"The miscreant!" ejaculated Buffalo Bill, as he turned to the ladies, while a smile chased from his face the stern look with which he had regarded Berrill. "I came near killing him and casting his carcass into the fire, which he doubtless kindled. But two reflections have saved him. The first was that he's not worth the powder, and the second is that I don't wish to mar the happiness of this moment by any such violence. Was it here?" and he waved his hand over the embers of the cottage, "that you found your mother, Althie?"

"It was, sir," answered the girl. "She has been living here for years, in ignorance of father's whereabouts, or mine, and even of our existence. What a strange thing is human life, Mr. Cody, as I was just thinking. How continually the schemes of wicked men are being overruled for good! For instance, if this rascally overseer had not brought me here, with a view to having me completely at his mercy, and so forcing me to accept his unwelcome attentions, I might have never known of my mother's existence!"

"I am not so sure about that," replied Buffalo Bill, smilingly. "I had already decided to bring you here, as I recently conceived a suspicion of the lady's identity with Mrs. Pilot!"

"Indeed! Well, that's another proof of the strangeness of human life of which I was speaking. But what about Harry, Mr. Cody?" added the girl, anxiously.

"He was captured after your departure from the Pines, and has been carried to Rosedale as a prisoner," answered Buffalo Bill. "You know what sort of a place Rosedale is, I believe?"

"Not exactly."

"Well, it's a den of outlaws who masquerade there under assumed names when they are too severely 'wanted' elsewhere—one of the queerest settlements, in fact, which has ever come to my knowledge. Berrill has a house there, and so has Artilow, with others too numerous to mention. Of course we shall start for Rosedale immediately, as the rescue of Harry Pollock is the first thing that claims our attention!"

"How good of you, Mr. Cody, to forestall the request I was about to make!" cried Althie, looking up gratefully, with a long sigh of relief. "You will fly with us to Harry's deliverance?"

"As a matter of course. But first I'll dispose of this fellow," he indicated Berrill, "by leaving him bound in such a way that he cannot untie himself under an hour."

"Couldn't you make it two hours?" cried Mrs. Pilot, almost gayly. "This will afford him all the more time to repent of his misdoings."

"True—if some prowling coyote don't make a meal hereabouts in something less than the time specified. Two hours let it be. Like all the rest of us, he must take his chances. There! he'll stay here at least a couple of hours, and shoot no one during this time."

The ladies expressed their admiration of the work, which the scout had finished while speaking, and approved the result.

"And now to be off," resumed Buffalo Bill. "Where are those ponies, Althie?"

"Berrill has hid them," replied the maiden,

"but at no great distance. They can doubtless be found!"

They were found, and within a minute thereafter the ladies and their rescuer were leaving the ruins of the cottage behind them, with Berrill forming anything but an ornament in the foreground, as he entered upon the task of freeing himself from the ingenious knots with which the scout had bound him.

One of the ladies—the reader may guess which—was compelled to use two stirrups to her saddle, but she did not complain of the circumstance, and never did fair lady ride more gracefully and safely than did the said lady on that occasion.

Little was said for several minutes, and then the scout broke the silence by saying:

"I should have been here sooner, Althie, if I hadn't been engaged in securing you a splendid dower!"

"My dower, Mr. Cody!" and Althie blushed scarlet.

"Yes, and a nice one it is! Nothing less than a ton of gold nuggets from your father's wonderful mine!"

"Tell me all about it—do!" pleaded Althie.

"Then listen," began Buffalo Bill. "It seems that your father has discovered a wonderful gold-mine—one which he confidently expects will eclipse all others—a veritable mountain of gold—"

"How like a fairy-tale!" breathed Althie.

"To be sure!" agreed Mrs. Pilot.

"But it also seems that half a dozen men have been to this mine and brought away a ton of nuggets in a wagon. I encountered this wagon, captured it, and got away with it, having had the good luck to seize it just as a band of hostiles were sweeping down upon it. Such fun!" and the scout laughed heartily. "The thieves and the hostiles nearly exterminated themselves in pitched battle before they discovered that a third party, wholly unknown to them, had made good his escape with the booty."

"And you still have the gold, Mr. Cody?" asked Althie.

"I at least hid it at a spot where I do not believe it will be found by either thieves or hostiles," declared Buffalo Bill. "We shall reach that spot in less than an hour, and be in full possession of the treasure, if nothing has happened!"

How joyfully the ladies followed his lead, with such prospects as these, can be easily imagined.

CHAPTER XXX.

BETWEEN THIEVES AND HOSTILES.

WHILE giving to Althie the particulars of her lover's capture, and informing Mrs. Pilot of the newest facts concerning her husband—so far as he knew them—Buffalo Bill did not fail to keep a wary eye and ear upon his surroundings. He realized only too keenly that he was still beset by peril.

To begin with, Berrill was still behind him, as capable and resolute as ever, if by any one of a dozen possible eventualities and contingencies he should find himself suddenly restored to freedom.

And Berrill was not an adversary to be despised.

As Harry had learned from Jerry Winkle, and in due course communicated to Buffalo Bill, Berrill had often been seen fighting in the ranks of the Jay Hawks, as was natural enough, seeing that he was a trusted confederate of Judge Clipperton.

In other terms, Berrill was nearly as much a lieutenant of Rink Artilow, under the latter's real name, as he was his associate under the name Rink had assumed.

From such a man, therefore, there was still danger to be apprehended, the more especially as the overseer had become as thoroughly infatuated in his foolish attempt at wooing as any man can be.

But Berrill was really the least of Buffalo Bill's preoccupations.

A more important matter was that he had assumed the responsibility of escorting Althie to Rosedale and restoring her to the care of Harry Pollock.

And this measure of course implied the further duty of finding and releasing Harry himself, in case he had not found means of his own to escape from his captors.

Then there was Mrs. Pilot, whose restoration to her husband, after so many terrible years of separation, was naturally an object of the scout's keenest solicitude.

Add to these anxieties the fact that the thieves who had stolen the gold of Jack Pilot must necessarily be trying to recover it, and that the hostiles who were seeking to rob the thieves were sure to be equally active in their searches, and it will be seen that the scout had only too many reasons to be watchful and guarded.

At the best, he was between two fires.

The hunt of the thieves and hostiles for each other might be converted into a hunt for him at any moment.

This hunt, too, was sure to rage and range over such a wide extent of territory that the

scout's chances of trouble were greatly increased, inasmuch as his course lay a long time in their midst.

Nevertheless, Buffalo Bill, as is his wont, had very few misgivings.

Giving the ladies a sufficient suggestion of the perils that might arise, he mentioned that he had some intimate acquaintance with his surroundings—having been in the neighborhood before—and that he felt confident of getting them through to Rosedale in safety, if they would kindly second all his measures in case of trouble.

"It's some little distance yet to the spot where you left the gold, I suppose, Mr. Cody?" asked Althie, after all the features of the situation had been duly discussed.

"Scarcely three miles, Miss Pilot."

"And you still think it will be safe to take it in our way?"

"It will be quite as well to take this course. The horse I am riding is one of four I found hitched to the wagon, and he's more of a tender-foot than I supposed. I'd be sorry to get caught in a tight place with him."

"Your idea, then—"

"Is to push on to the spot where I left the gold, and restore this fellow to his harness. I presume the other three horses are in reasonably good shape for the drive before us. The ponies," and he glanced at them critically, "seem to have had about all they can stand. Besides, in case of trouble, with hostiles howling around us, you'd be safer in the bottom of the wagon than on the backs of these rats. They'd be likely to run you and Mrs. Pilot off in separate directions, so that I could neither follow nor defend you."

The ladies were strongly of the same view.

"Of course I'd not give a thought to the gold, if that thought were in the least detrimental to your safety," added Buffalo Bill. "It's only because a transfer to the wagon is in harmony with this last and principal consideration that I am taking this line of action."

The mother and daughter signified that they understood and approved all he was doing.

"But how is it, Mr. Cody, that you have been able to conceal a large wagon and three horses when a crowd of people must necessarily be on your trail?" asked Althie.

"As you suggest, the task is not an easy one," answered the scout, "but I venture to believe I have managed it in such a way as to make a success of it. To begin with, I had a fair start. Then I drove a mile in a brook which is too muddy at the moment to allow the trail to be seen. Pulling out on the left bank, I went on another mile, and then entered the brook again, but instead of continuing to ascend the stream, I faced squarely about and descended it a mile and a half, thus returning to within half a mile of the point where I first struck it. Here I pulled out upon a sward so compact and long as to show very little trace of the wheels and horses, and was soon in a forest so thickly strewn with rustling leaves as to hardly announce our passage. In this way I gained a dense covert of pines, at a point opposite to that in which the pursuers would naturally look for me. Give them time enough, and they will of course find my hiding-place, but I expect to get back to it before it is discovered."

"And to think that all these ruses are necessary to one's very existence on the plains, Mr. Cody," commented Althie. "I should think you would weary of this sort of life."

"No one ever wearies of what he likes to do and what he can do well, Miss Pilot," answered the scout, with a grave smile. "The charm of such a career can be realized only by those who are able to command success in all situations."

"As you have always done and are doing, Mr. Cody!" cried Althie, enthusiastically. "I get your idea perfectly, and it is astonishing in what a new light it places such wild lives as yours, which had before seemed so strange!"

"And now to ride a few minutes as fast as we can," suggested Buffalo Bill, after a repetition of his constant watchful glances around and behind him. In ten minutes more, we ought to be at the spot where I left the wagon!"

He had put his horse to a gallop while speaking, and his companions did not lose an instant in following his example.

"The fact is, ladies—as I'm bound to tell you frankly—that Berrill has been released," added Buffalo Bill, "and he'll soon be within sight behind us!"

Althie paled, as she sent a startled glance in the direction indicated.

She could detect no sign of a pursuit, however.

To her unpracticed eye, everything was as quiet as ever in that quarter.

"I see nothing of him—or any one else," she faltered. "How do you know that he is pursuing us, Mr. Cody?"

"I will tell you. That some one is pursuing us, is indicated by the flight of those crows we saw in a blasted pine near which we passed. That the pursuer is approaching rapidly, is shown by the air of alarm with which the crows took flight. That the pursuers are several in number, is attested by the fact that they have no hesitation in following our trail, which shows

that there are three of us. And that these pursuers are Berrill and the men who released him—probably a gang of Jay Hawks—is the first and most natural theory of such an advance from that particular quarter at this moment."

How plain it all was, when read by the eyes of the experienced plainsman!

The ladies had no doubt that the facts were precisely as he had stated, and it was with the energy of desperation that they incited their steeds to quicken their already furious gallop.

"You will not see them just yet," added Buffalo Bill, "at the pace we're now taking. And of course you will not hear them until long after they are in view, as all the clatter they can make is completely drowned by that we are making."

"But they're gaining upon us!" cried Mrs. Pilot, with an alarm she could hardly master.

"Naturally enough, but slowly!"

"The end must be the same, however," sighed Althie. "Sooner or later, if gaining even slowly, they must overtake us!"

"Not necessarily," and Buffalo Bill turned upon her a face as calm and smiling as she had ever seen it. "In fact, I expect to give them the slip without much trouble."

"How is that possible?"

The scout bent a keen glance ahead, and then at a faint cloud of dust which had appeared upon his left, at a point nearly at right angles to the place where he himself could be in another minute and a half at the rate of speed at which he was going.

"Why, the pursuers will soon have a party of hostiles on their hands, and will have to draw rein to investigate. Then will follow a fight or flight of both parties, and either course will be all we require. Of course we shall not wait to be pinched between them, but will change our direction sharply to the right, come to a walk, under suitable cover, and steal away in silence!"

Looking sharply in the new direction he intended to take, the scout soon saw just what he desired to see—a low water-course, as crooked as a ram's horn, and fringed with bushes.

"Pull up sharply, both of you, as soon as we reach that water-course," he said, with an energetic gesture, "and turn to the right."

"Into the brook you mean?" cried Althie.

"Exactly."

This measure having been executed, the scout led the way down the brook at a walk as quietly as if nothing was at stake.

A somewhat abrupt bend was soon reached and passed, when the fugitives found themselves protected by a moderately high bluff, which was densely wooded, from the gaze of any one who might pass upon the trail they themselves had just been following.

"Silence, now," enjoined the scout, as he drew rein. "Listen!"

What a clatter was that which resounded from their late trail, when their horses had come to a halt, standing to their breasts in water!

Furious indeed was the pursuit!

Cautioning the ladies by a gesture not to follow him, Buffalo Bill descended the brook a few rods further, thus passing the bluff to which we have alluded, and reaching a point to where he could see the pursuers.

It was exactly as he had said.

Foremost in the chase was Berrill, with all the wild energy of his nature alert, and behind him came five or six men, all well armed and well mounted, some of whom were instantly recognized by Buffalo Bill as Jay Hawks he had seen the night the Wild West entertainment was ditched, or later.

He explained these facts in a few words to the ladies, while taking anew the bearings of the faint cloud of dust he had remarked—a display that was not yet perceptible to Althie and her mother—and then he said:

"Follow me now as quietly as you can, and do as I do."

He retreated from the brook in a direction which was nearly at right angles with his previous course, keeping constantly to the cover afforded by the trees and bushes lining the water-course, and within a single minute thereafter, riding at an ordinary walk, the trio had given the pursuers the slip, precisely as expected and promised.

"We're safe now, for the present," said the scout, looking around to give his companions a reassuring smile. "But such is hardly the case with Berrill and friends. They're just about waking up to the presence of the hostiles."

As if to confirm this view, the reports of several shots were heard in quick succession.

The scout smiled with his most contented air.

"That's the way of the world," he ejaculated. "Having got the Jay Hawks and hostiles by the ears, we can now make our way direct to the wagon. In a few minutes more, if you will ride as I do, we'll have that ton of nuggets in our keeping."

He set off at an easy pace, which was soon increased to a gallop, and for at least five minutes not another word was uttered.

"Good-luck again," then exclaimed Buffalo Bill as he began moderating his pace. "Yonder is our wagon with the horses. We have only to transfer ourselves and slip the harness upon this fellow's back, getting the four into their traces, and away we'll go."

This programme was carried out in less than ten additional minutes, and for the first time since the announcement of the pursuit, Althie and her mother ceased to look anxious.

"Glorious, is it not, dear mother, to be able to trick those rascals in this fashion," cried Althie, whose soul suddenly arose to an altitude corresponding to its previous depression. "We're safe, you see."

"Yes—until the next danger comes," supplemented Buffalo Bill, as he applied himself seriously to the handling of his four-in-hand. "And my opinion is that it is not far distant!"

The ladies looked startled again, turning inquiring glances upon him.

"I hear those thieves," he explained—"those fellows who stole this gold from your husband's mine, Mrs. Pilot. They're on the trail by which I brought the wagon to the spot where you found it. In a very few minutes more they would have come up with it. Clearly enough they've unraveled the puzzle I set them in driving the wagon away from their camp. Fortunately, however, we're still some distance ahead, and their horses may be no fresher than ours. Get up, there!" he added, swinging his lash over the leaders. "We've got something to do, but we can do it!"

And away they went like a cyclone incarnate!

CHAPTER XXXI.

A TERRIBLE VISITANT.

AT the moment when "Dr. Jones" uttered the latest sentence recorded from his lips, a lithe figure came actively into the wide hall, advancing toward the door of the dining room, near which stood the two brothers, with "Mrs. Jones" just behind them.

The attention of the trio was instantly attracted to the new-comer, and with good reason.

A mere glimpse only of his face could be seen, so completely was it enveloped in the feathers of an enormous head-dress he was wearing, and his whole person was literally buried under a robe of skins in which long turkey-feathers had been inserted perpendicularly, until it bristled

"Like quills upon the fretful porcupine!"

"Ah, who have we here?" inquired the pretended doctor, a little nervously, as the new-comer came to a halt and looked at each of the three Artilows in succession with a keenly-searching gaze.

"The Rolling Thunder!" was the answer.

"Ugh! Big medicine-man!" exclaimed Rink Artilow, with a careless laugh. "You'll have to look to your laurels, Ralph."

"Evidently the Rolling Thunder is not here to give medicine or to take it, said Mrs. Artilow, otherwise 'Mrs. Jones,' with the freedom of speech and manners which had become habitual to her. "He looks to me more like a 'noble red-man' in quest of a dinner."

"Well, Mr. Rolling Thunder, out with it," invited the proprietor of the "Sanitarium," his curiosity beginning to get active. "What can I do for you?"

"I've something very curious to show you," answered the new-comer. "See here!"

The speaker produced a small, round article which might have been a roll of manuscript, a tiny field-glass, or a piece of gas-pipe converted into a bomb, but which was not either of these objects.

"Here you see a most wonderful weapon for casual and miscellaneous hostilities," pursued the new-comer. "It is a tool of my invention. As simple as it looks, it is one of the most dangerous arms a man can carry upon his person. Permit me—"

"The fellow's not talking Indian, you see," interrupted the pretended doctor, with a somewhat startled and uneasy air.

"No, sir, I'm talking plain English," declared the exhibitor, with a strange light in his eyes, as he took hold of the mysterious roll-like object with a firm grasp. "The machine I have the honor of exhibiting to you is called the Universal and Eternal Stunner—"

"But why the Stunner?" asked Rink Artilow, becoming even more curious than his brother.

"Because a slight blow from it is enough to stun a man—to stun him so effectively that you have ample time to bind him hand and foot before he can recover his senses. You realize at a glance how handy it would be to have such an instrument as that in use in the Flying Tavern. It would be excellent for a garroter. No road-agent should be without it. It would even be a splendid pocket-piece for the leader of the Jay Hawks!"

"See here, my man, who the deuce are you?" cried the pretended doctor, as he recoiled a step or two, and laid his hand on a revolver, staring the while wonderingly at the Rolling Thunder. "Your language seems to be seasoned with a

spice of mystery. It even trenches upon what I may call family secrets. Who are you?"

"Just keep quiet a moment, Mr. Artilow," returned the visitant, "and your every question will be answered."

"But why Eternal Stunner?" asked Mrs. Artilow, with a woman's curiosity.

"Because it is constantly in order and can be used forever," answered the mysterious visitor.

"But how is it used?" asked Rink Artilow.

"I will show you!"

Placing himself between the two brothers, the Rolling Thunder gave each a tap with the instrument, using each end of it in quick succession.

At each tap there was a low, sharp report, as of an explosion, like the report of an ordinary percussion-cap, and at each stroke a man fell to the floor, where he lay as silent and motionless as if dead.

"Rascal! What are you doing?" cried Mrs. Artilow, in a rage. "They did not wish to be knocked down with your new invention!"

"You think not? I was merely giving them a practical example of the use to which this innocent-looking tool can be put!"

"Impudent creature!" ejaculated Mrs. Artilow, flushing with rage, as she looked from her husband to his brother. "How long will it be before they recover their senses?"

"Oh, quite long enough for all practical purposes," returned the visitant. "I hope you have no objections to a personal test."

The old woman had barely time to utter one shrill scream of terror, and then she also received a quietus, in the shape of a gentle tap on one of her temples, which stretched her senseless on the floor.

For the first time in the silence that succeeded the new-comer bent a comprehensive glance around him, while his fingers closed with renewed force upon the mysterious roll in his right hand.

"Any more of them?" was evidently his mental inquiry.

The silence continuing, he drew some stout cords from his pocket, replacing them with the mysterious roll, and bound the three insensible persons securely with a quickness and a method which showed that he had more than once been engaged in a similar operation.

"There! curse you!" he muttered, with a quiet, but awful depth of feeling. "I haven't watched you in vain! Where's that pretended black fellow? He can only have gone to the stable."

He stepped out the back door, and was absent about a minute, the interval being characterized by a single report from the signaled weapon he carried, and then he came into the hall, dragging Bradd Artilow by the collar of his coat.

Depositing the young reprobate beside his father, the intruder bound him as efficiently as quickly.

"Four of them!" he then muttered. "Any more?"

He was answered by the advent of the robber-chief's two men, Howell and Luke, who came in at the back door, revolvers in hand, and in a state of agitation which can be easily comprehended.

They had been taking care of the horses with which they had come from the Pines, and had started for the house just in time to catch a glimpse of Bradd's assailant, as he dragged the insensible youth into the hall.

"What's going on here?" asked Luke, in open-mouthed astonishment, as he surveyed the four figures extended upon the floor.

"Evidently the work of some enemy," returned the young stranger, as he placed a cigar between his lips and proceeded to light it, without losing sight of the questioner and his comrade. "As you see, they're all senseless and bound!"

This coolness diverted the gaze of the pair for a single moment, but that instant was full of calamity for them, the mysterious intruder passing between them and giving them each a tap which reduced them to instant quiescence.

To bind them, in the style of their predecessors, was the work of a few moments.

"Six of them!" then commented the intruder, as he again restored his mysterious roll to his pocket. "Is that all?"

It was, clearly enough, as the exhibitor of the "Stunner" decided, after a short but comprehensive exploration of his surroundings.

Proceeding to a wash-room between the bar and parlor, the mysterious visitant laid off his massive robe and head-dress, and set about the task of removing from his features the paint which had in a measure served to conceal his identity from the Artilows.

When he had finished the task, he took a look at his reflection in a mirror, which seemed to satisfy him, and then returned to the presence of his prisoners, seating himself in an arm-chair of ample dimensions, and continuing to enjoy his cigar with a quiet but singularly stern and resolute mien.

At length there was a stir near him, and his eyes turned in the direction of the noise thus produced.

Rink Artilow had just recovered his senses, and was staring around with a strangely wondering gaze.

At sight of the calm, stern face bent toward him, the leader of the Jay Hawks uttered an indescribable yell of terror.

"Daredeath Dick!" he yelled, rather than said.

The object of this excited recognition merely smiled, but that smile was like a lurid flash from the bottomless pit, it was so deadly, so revengeful, so menacing.

It was soon Mrs. Artilow's turn to take cognizance of the situation, and her terror at recognizing Daredeath Dick was fully equal to that which had been manifested by her brother-in-law.

Then came the turns of Ralph Artilow and his son Bradd.

"Yes, I am Daredeath Dick," acknowledged the young hero, as he threw away his cigar with an air which meant business. "I am glad to see that you remember me. The recognition is mutual! I remember you, too! Oh, yes, I remember you!"

And if all the growls uttered during ten years by a tiger had been compressed into one growl, it could not have been more deadly and significant than was the tone of that blue-eyed, fair-headed youth, as he repeated, with white, bloodless lips:

"Oh, yes—I remember you!"

Remember them!

Did he not remember how Rink Artilow, as the chief of the Jay Hawks, had murdered his brave comrades, and stretched Dick and Harry upon a bed of mortal anguish which had been endured for months, and which was kept from a fatal termination only by the devotion of Althie to her lover, and by Dick's naturally splendid constitution?

Did he not remember how he had been entrapped in the Flying Tavern, and thrust out upon the prairie by Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Artilow, while he was unconscious from the deadly drug they had administered—turned out, helpless and alone, to be eaten alive by the wolves and coyotes, or to die?

How well he remembered them, his broken health and his wasted figure could have told even a casual observer.

"And now that the tables are turned, Rink Artilow, now that you are helpless in my hands, 'Doctor Jones,' what do you suppose is going to happen?" pursued Daredeath Dick, as his glances flashed over the motionless figures before him.

"I can't say—I'm sure," answered Rink Artilow, his face whitening with every breath he drew, and his eyes staring as if they would burst from their sockets.

"And you, doctor?" cried Daredeath Dick, as he turned his burning gaze upon the proprietor of the pretended Sanitarium. "What do you suppose is going to happen to you, now that I am master here?"

"I—I can't even imagine!" was the answer.

"Liars, both of you!" exclaimed Dick, with flashing eyes, as he leaped to his feet. "You know only too well what is coming! I can read it in your craven looks—in your appealing eyes!"

Ah! their rudely awakened consciences had told those murderous criminals only too well what their fate would be!

The very glance of their captor was a scorching and withering fire of death!

"And you, woman!" proceeded Dick, as he turned to Mrs. Artilow—"you, who have so often murdered your kind, and cruelly slain the child with its mother, during the long years in which you and your fiendish husband have been roving over the plains and through the valleys with your accursed Flying Tavern—what do you suppose, I say, will be the fate of these terrible men?"

"I suppose they will be punished," answered Mrs. Artilow, in a faint, hesitating voice.

"You're right, woman," cried Dick. "These men, these two leaders of assassins, these two wretched murderers-in-chief, who have been instrumental in the destruction of scores of innocent men, women and children, are about to be hanged! They're about to be lynched by a mob!"

At that awful word—the meanest and grandest of all words—the most revolting and honest—the most hideous and attractive—at that awful word, we say, which is at once so sublime and atrocious, the eyes of the prisoners were all bent inquiringly around, and every ear was inclined in listening.

But not a sound arose in any direction—no rush of footsteps, no chorus of excited voices, not a sign or a sound of all those signs and sounds by which the administration of the peculiar justice of Judge Lynch is universally characterized.

Instead, what a sinister silence!

"I—I see nothing, hear nothing of any mob!" at length panted Rink Artilow, venturing to draw a full respiration.

"Oh, yes—you do!" returned Dick. "The mob is here! I am the mob! The mob which has taken charge of your case is a mob of one!"

There were a few attempts at protest, but they were not heeded.

In less than a minute both Rink Artilow and his brother were pendent from the upper banister rods of the staircase.

Lighting a fresh cigar, Dick watched the convulsions of the two men until they had ceased, his wild glances gradually becoming less wild, and by the time both forms had become motionless in death, his eyes had become as mild and gentle as those of a gazelle.

His desire for revenge had been appeased!

His sense of duty and justice satisfied!

"I shall let the rest of you live for repentance," said Dick, as his glances flitted over the scared faces turned toward him. "To do this would in any case be a duty, Mrs. Artilow, so far as you are concerned. Every woman is what some man has made her, and hence can in no case be made an object of extreme punishments. But let the lesson I have given you be evermore heeded!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

RESCUE AND RESTORATION.

HELPING himself to the keys in the pockets of the pretended doctor, Daredeath Dick began a survey of the premises, arriving in due course at the cellar, with its prison-like displays and arrangements.

As he descended the stairs, he overheard voices, and paused a moment to listen.

"It's so, father! Such is the character of these terrible people," Harry Pollock was saying. "If we do not give them the immense ransom demanded, we shall never leave these walls alive! They have said so, in so many words. And even if we should be willing to buy our lives at such a price, Adeline and I will have to remain shut up five or six weeks in this hole, as you cannot go to England and back in less than that time, even if there should be no trouble about raising the money. You see in what an awful situation we are placed. Unless Daredeath Dick should soon come to our aid—"

Dick did not wait for any further speculations on the subject, but quietly resumed his descent of the stairs, soon reaching the bottom.

"Ah, God of mercy!" suddenly cried Harry, who had become silent on hearing Dick's footsteps.

"What is it, my son?" asked the baronet.

"Are they coming to murder us?" cried Adeline.

"Here he comes—that glorious Dick!" resumed Harry, in tones of the wildest joy. "We're saved!"

How like an angel-deliverer of the old fairy times did the new-comer look to Adeline Pollock, as he stepped to the door of her dungeon and opened it, and then rendered a like service to her father and brother and Jack Pilot.

The joy of that glad scene cannot be told in words, but must be left to the imagination of the reader.

How warmly Adeline admired Dick, as greetings and explanations were exchanged, will be understood without the telling.

Heart-free until that fateful meeting, she was heart-free no longer!

It must be confessed, however, that few heroes have such a splendid chance to make an impression as had been presented to Dick—a chance to rescue the father and brother of the heroine, as well as the heroine herself, by one and the same effort.

"Now, follow me, all of you," invited Dick, as he led the way up-stairs his soul thrilling with delight at the fervency of Adeline's thanks, to say nothing of those of her fellow-prisoners. "We're masters here, my friends, and have only to exercise a fair amount of watchfulness to remain so."

The amazement of the rescued party as they saw the four helpless figures on the floor and the two bodies hanging from the banisters found expression in a flood of excited questions and exclamations.

"Why, who can have done this?" asked the baronet, as he at length turned to Dick.

"It is the work of a mob, Sir Francis," replied Dick, quietly.

"A mob!" cried Harry. "I haven't heard the least indication of a mob's presence."

"That's because the mob in this case was a very peculiar one, Harry," explained Dick, with a significant smile. "I heard it, and saw it, so that I am perfectly in a position to tell you all about it. Not now, but later."

A brief discussion of the situation by the young heroes resulted in a resolve to take the outlaws, both the dead and the living, to the cellar, and to people with them the dungeons which had just been vacated.

There was both wisdom and prudence in this measure.

The rescued party was by no means in safety, although at large.

At even a hint of their real situation the lawless villains who constituted the population of Rosedale would have exterminated them without hesitation or mercy.

No time was lost, therefore, in executing the

measure which had been decided upon, and the Sanitarium passed, for the time being, into the hands of the rescued prisoners and their champion.

"And now to make ourselves comfortable," proposed Daredeath Dick, as he led the way into the dining-room. "As you see," and he waved his hand toward the hall into which a radiant glow had begun to stream, "one long night of anguish is over, and a new day is at hand. We'll have as nice a breakfast as the resources of the 'Sanitarium' will permit, and be ready to depart as soon as Nate Salsbury makes his appearance with a suitable escort, the particulars of which have all been arranged. I cannot tell just when he will be here, but he will certainly arrive in the course of the day. Meanwhile, we can hold our own against all comers, and if we should secure a few hours' of sleep all around, so much the better."

We need not narrate at length the events of that glorious morning; how soul responded to soul; how the baronet and Jack Pilot grew more and more sympathetic over their breakfast and the cigars which followed it; how Daredeath Dick, with Adeline on one hand and Harry on the other, began to feel that he was in possession of all that earth can give or promise—in a word, how all our sorely-tried friends rejoiced at the turn affairs had taken.

The forenoon was wearing away and the happy party were still in the midst of their mingled explanations and rejoicings, when the rumble of heavy wheels was heard in an adjacent street, and promptly rose louder and louder, as it approached the "Sanitarium."

"Ah! there's Nate at last!" cried Dick.

There was a general rush for the front entrance.

Ay, it was Nate, sure enough, holding the reins over four stout horses, and having a dozen noble-looking fellows beside and around him, all armed with rifles and revolvers.

But this was not all.

What other roar and rumble was that which continued to be heard after Nate Salsbury had brought his horses to a stand-still in such fine style at the door of the den of the Artilows?

The answer was not long in coming.

As all eyes turned toward the quarter from which this furious clatter arose, a splendid four-in-hand suddenly came at a gallop around a corner, and BUFFALO BILL, standing erect upon the seat, and braced backward at an angle of sixty-five or seventy degrees, with his long hair waving, his face glowing with joyous triumph and relief, and his eyes gleaming like those of a knightly conqueror, came dashing up to the steps upon which Nate and his escort had just dismounted.

All the surviving thieves and hostiles had been distanced, killed, or discouraged, and the dower of Althie, as Buffalo Bill had called it—the ton of golden nuggets—had been brought off safely from the scene of battle!

What followed can be briefly told.

"Oh, my wife! my wife!" cried Jack Pilot, rushing forward with outstretched arms as he caught sight of the elder lady, who was accompanying Buffalo Bill. "At last! at last!"

What a fervent embrace was that with which the long-separated couple again came together!

It was as if they would no more be separated forever!

"My darling! my own!" exclaimed Harry Pollock, as he sprung toward Althie. "What joy! what relief!"

"We're all here, it seems, and in good condition!" cried Buffalo Bill, as he flung the reins over the backs of his foaming steeds, and leaped down into the arms of Nate and the baronet, Daredeath Dick and the rest. "It is evident that our Wild West entertainment is a success, even when ditched in the wilderness! Three cheers and a tiger, boys, for these glorious successes and restorations!"

How they all rejoiced and explained? Can't every reader imagine it?

How they "cleaned out" Rosedale before they rode and drove away toward the Wild West camp?

How Buskirk, the treacherous Buskirk, had been surprised by Buffalo Bill at the little stone house of Berrill, and not only captured, but forced to tell all he knew about the whereabouts of the robber-chief?

How it at length became known when and in what way Dick had figured as a mob "all alone by himself?"

How Mrs. Artilow was duly tried and sentenced to imprisonment for life, while her son and her other associates were imprisoned according to their several degrees of wickedness?

And, finally, how Harry and Althie entered upon the wedded felicity they deserved, thus setting an example which Daredeath Dick and Adeline Pollock were promptly in a fair way to follow?

Verily! these things can be arranged by every reader to his or her own satisfaction as can also the happiness of Mr. and Mrs. Pilot, the baronet, and all the other worthy actors of our tale.

THE END.

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